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HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET

# IN LETTERS OF GOLD

BY

THOMAS ST. E. HAKE

And what's to come of my <sup>· Gone she is,</sup> despised time  
Is nought but bitterness.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# IN LETTERS OF GOLD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### FOOTSTEPS.

ON the river side of Thames Street, within a large court-yard, there stands an old mansion. Over the doorway hangs a huge, shell-shaped canopy, or roof: it is fashioned out of dark oak, and fantastically carved. It is like an angry brow frowning down upon the dim lamp beneath it.

One night, early in autumn, two men

were standing under this lamp. The courtyard was surrounded by lofty wharves and warehouses. The only sound, which stole about in whispers, was the low muttering of the tide, ebbing, or flowing, with a soft gurgling noise among the barges hard by: the current was seldom unheard.

The lamp over the doorway of the mansion was the only light within the yard. The reflection of street lamps, struggling at the entrance of the court, penetrated no further than the gateway. From the river there were no direct rays of light, except at moments when the moon broke from black clouds, and flung a glitter across the water resembling the flash of a dark lantern. It was a silent, shadowy, deserted place.

‘You can hear it now, Nedlicott, can’t you?’ said the elder of the two, peering

fiercely into the shadows, and then listening with the keenness of a watch-dog. 'That's her footstep! That's what has been troubling me, by night and by day, for fifteen years. Ay, ay. By night,' he repeated, with a haunted look, 'by night and by day, Nedlicott, for fifteen long years.'

He was leaning heavily against the iron railings in front of the house. His appearance, threadbare and dejected, was like that of a wretched being who had been stranded by the last tide. Nedlicott was a good-looking man of twenty-eight or nine. He was clad in a brown velvet coat, and a low-crowned felt hat. As he stepped close to the other, and placed his hand kindly upon his shoulder, something theatrical in the manner was whimsically expressed.

‘Wildrake,’ said he, ‘your brain is full of odd fancies to-night: you want rest.’

‘I want sleep,’ muttered Wildrake, ‘what I want is sleep.’

As he spoke, his head began to sink down until it found a pillow on the broken spikes: he then closed his eyes.

With a shrug of the shoulders Nedlicott turned away, walking up and down the echoing court-yard in front of the mansion. The old house stood in sombre shadows. In the roof there were several gables: and a group of tall, crooked chimneys grotesquely rose up behind them. On each side of the massive doorway were two large windows, with rows of five windows on the stories above, all as destitute of light as the dark walls.



Nedlicott stopped opposite to Wildrake and looked at him attentively.

‘ Drifting, ’ he soliloquised, ‘ always drifting ; faster every day—faster and faster.’

As though he had heard Nedlicott’s voice, Wildrake, without opening his eyes, muttered some inarticulate words, like a person talking in his sleep.

‘ It’s a long time,’ Nedlicott still meditated aloud, ‘ a long time to be drifting. Fifteen years ! It seems to me a very long time indeed. What can it mean ?’

At this moment the old church clocks, in the neighbourhood of Thames Street, began chiming and striking in clamorous confusion : but this discord was soon drowned by the droning sound of the great clock of St. Paul’s.

‘ Two ! ’ exclaimed Nedlicott.

He approached Wildrake and laid his hand upon his arm.

‘Give me your latch-key,’ said he, ‘and let me open the door.’

Wildrake raised his head, and stared at Nedlicott drowsily. He fumbled in his pockets and succeeded in producing a bunch of keys which he regarded with some bewilderment.

‘Don’t you trouble, Ned. I can manage myself.’

Ascending the steps he rattled the keys as he stumbled forward. Nedlicott stood watching him, as one watches a venturesome child.

Wildrake bent down. He groped about with a key around a wide circumference of the key-hole. In the midst of this operation he stopped suddenly and listened. The bunch of keys fell from his

grasp, jingling upon the flag-stone at his feet.

‘Hark! That’s her—she is coming back,’ he whispered, ‘my daughter is coming back! I never heard her footsteps like that before—never so distinctly as I hear them now. Eh? Wait, Nedlicott, wait! A moment longer: only a moment. She is coming back to me at last.’

He spoke in a low, awe-stricken tone as he leant forward and listened, gripping the railings convulsively with his long lean fingers. There was a bright flash in his habitually dull eyes, and his lips were parted and trembling: every feature in his wrinkled face seemed on the alert: his whole attitude was that of eagerness, and all absorbing expectation. Nedlicott stooped down and picked up the keys.

‘Let me open the door,’ said he.

Wildrake, as though stricken with ague, was now shaking from head to foot.

‘Wait, Nedlicott, wait!’ he repeated, in a piteous tone, ‘only one moment.’

But Nedlicott had by this time turned the lock. The door opened slowly, groaning on its rusty hinges. A large hall was disclosed, where an oil lamp was burning feebly in a corner. Wildrake’s manner changed. He stood up, and, exerting a ghastly effort to master his emotion, stepped into the hall. The door was shut behind him; and Nedlicott was gone.



## CHAPTER II.

## AN OLD CUSTOMER.

LEADING from Queenhithe to St. Paul's, in a steep and narrow street, was a small dwelling wedged in between two lofty warehouses, which gave it a thin and pinched appearance. It was three stories high : on the ground floor was a little shop, like a ship's cabin ; and over the shop door, in faded letters, was painted :

*Nedlicott, Tobacconist.*

Behind the shop there was a parlour : a snugly-furnished room, with a cheerful fire

burning in the grate. In this parlour Nedlicott was seated on the morning after his night with Wildrake.

A woman, with a pleasing, though slightly worn face, was moving actively about the room. She frequently cast a look through the little window of the door which communicated with the shop, as though distracted by the shadows of customers outside the threshold. But her glances were still more frequently directed towards Nedlicott, her son, as he sat near the fire pensively smoking his pipe.

‘Teddie,’ said the woman, laying a hand gently on Nedlicott’s shoulder, ‘shall I tell you your thoughts?’

‘Yes, mother.’

‘You have met that man Wildrake again. You are th            of him.’

Nedlicott looked up and nodded.

‘He puzzles me,’ said he, ‘more and more every time I meet him.’

After smoking for a moment in silence, he went on, musingly,

‘A secret trouble is wearing out the man’s life. What can it be? His broken-down condition is caused by this trouble: I am convinced of that. He has known brighter days.’

‘You told me,’ said the mother, quietly, ‘that he drank.’

‘Yes,’ said Nedlicott. ‘But I doubt if drink began it. He has been drinking to drown this trouble—a trouble which has weighed upon his mind for fifteen years.’

‘Ah,’ said Mrs. Nedlicott, ‘troubles are neighbour’s fare. Think of your poor

father dying, when you were only ten, and leaving me almost penniless. I did not give way, my dear : did I ?’

‘No, mother,’ said Nedlicott. ‘You had me to look after.’

Mrs. Nedlicott drew closer to her son and placed her hand caressingly on his shoulder.

‘But Wildrake,’ Nedlicott continued, ‘Wildrake is alone. That’s why I pity him. He is, as far as I can find out, quite friendless.’

‘He has my son,’ said the widow.

Nedlicott answered, in a thoughtful tone :

‘No ; he had been drifting too long when I ran against him.’

The widow smiled, and said, with tenderness :

‘I sometimes think, my dear, that you



take other people's troubles too much to heart.'

'Do you?' said Nedlicott, in a tone of surprise. 'I don't think, mother, if you had seen Wildrake last night, and had heard his strange words, that you would have been less touched than I was.'

'What strange words?'

'He spoke,' said Nedlicott, 'of footsteps which haunted him: the footsteps of a daughter. Is it not possible that this daughter, perhaps years ago, left her home and has never since had the courage to return? Is it not possible,' he added, 'that her life is too degraded, if she still lives, to permit her ever to look her father again in the face?'

The mother folded her hands upon her knees, and stared thoughtfully at the fire.

‘Let us hope, my dear boy,’ said she, ‘that the trouble is nothing so bad as that.’

At this moment the entrance to the shop was darkened by the figure of a little old man. His expression was an odd mixture of shrewdness and benevolence. He had a Jewish type of countenance. His beard was long and white; and his eyes, although sometimes penetrating in their glance, were habitually directed into space, as if visions were passing before him.

Mrs. Nedlicott, having caught sight of his shadow through the little window, was already behind the counter as he came forward, with a swift and kindly greeting, and put down a quaint old silver snuff-box. While the widow was replenishing it, he said:

‘May I ask, ma’am, whether Ned’s at home?’

‘Yes, Mr. Isaacs. Will you step in?’

‘Most willingly : I should like to have a word with him.’

The widow led the way into the parlour, followed by Mr. Isaacs.

‘Good-morning, Nedlicott,’ said the old Jew, giving the young man his hand. ‘Good-morning. Not disturbing dramatic work, I hope?’

‘Not in the least,’ Nedlicott asserted, laying aside a manuscript. ‘Won’t you sit down?’

Mr. Isaacs took a seat in a remote corner, if such a term can be applied to Mrs. Nedlicott’s diminutive parlour, and began to tap his snuff-box.

‘Nedlicott,’ said he, ‘I want your advice.

You should know something, if anyone does, about my troublesome lodger.'

'Wildrake? We were just talking about him.'

'The bad one! Yes, Nedlicott. That's the one I mean. Have you often met men like him?'

'Not often.'

'I should think not!' said the Jew. 'Dear me, no: it's not possible. What with his late hours, and his intemperate habits, he is the worst man I ever knew. You do your best, as I'm aware, to get him into my house before midnight; and I am grateful: I am indeed. But how can you always be at his elbow to coax or drive him home? It's not to be expected. You have enough to do to look after the comedies, that's clear. You can't be always bothered with such a dismal sub-

ject as the bad one. He's not merry enough for you: he's out of your line.'

'Perhaps,' said Nedlicott, thoughtfully, 'perhaps you are right. Though it's not so cheerful behind the scenes of a theatre, let me tell you, as you imagine! Wildrake interests me. Besides, he has, as I was just now saying, no friends.'

'None,' said the Jew, with emphasis. 'If he had they would come honestly forward, and pay the rent for that third floor front which has been so long overdue. I think the bad one begins to imagine that I ought to assign the room to him for life. At any rate, I never get a shilling—never! And, when I ask him why he doesn't settle up like a man, he becomes indignant, and insults me. He calls me Shylock. What can I do? I haven't the heart to turn him into the streets. Although,' the Jew

added, with anger in his tone, 'such a bad one deserves no better treatment. I suppose it wouldn't be possible to find out anything about him?'

'I doubt it,' said Nedlicott. 'He has been drifting for so many years that I question if he remembers from what point he started.'

'You have known him, Nedlicott, for a long time.'

'Yes. Ten years,' said Nedlicott, 'ten years at least. Our first meeting, I recollect, was at the "Loafers' Tavern," or Discussion Hall, as it is called. He was playing the same part then as he played last night. I see no change.'

'He's what they call chairman, or president at this tavern, is he not?'

'He occupies that honourable position,' said Nedlicott. 'He has a gift of the

gab. His loquacity amuses the customers, or "loafers," as they are styled, who frequent the house.'

'Isn't he paid?'

'Yes, in kind,' said Nedlicott, 'though not in coin. He is an attraction. The tavern-keeper, who appreciates his magnetic qualities, supplies him with as much meat and drink as he can swallow. His consumption of the latter article is, as there is no need to tell you, by no means small. He is in fact what we call in theatrical parlance a "draw." He creates no end of discussion; and if—no doubt that is how the tavern-keeper argues—he chooses to drink himself to death that's his own affair.'

The old Jew shook his head distressfully and took a pinch of snuff by way of consolation.

‘What a bad one, to be sure,’ he said. ‘Dear me, dear me! what a bad one! If he stops much longer in my house, I shall lose all my lodgers, I know I shall. It’s not respectable, Nedlicott: and, what’s more, I can’t afford it. His room is worth five shillings a week to me. I’ve told him so until I’m tired. He’ll have to find ten pounds somehow, and very soon too, or seek a lodging elsewhere. He will indeed. You cannot blame a poor man like me, Nedlicott, for looking a little after the rent. I’ve stood the bad one’s nonsense some time. I cannot stand it much longer.’

‘Wait, Mr. Isaacs, wait awhile,’ urged Nedlicott, ‘we must see what can be done: I dread to think what would become of Wildrake if he had not your roof to shelter him. I’d rather pay his rent myself than see him turned out. He is drifting



fast enough already. He would drift out of sight at once if you denied him a lodging in that old garret of yours in Gable Court. Wait awhile, Mr. Isaacs, wait awhile.'

'Well, well,' replied the Jew, relentingly, 'I don't want to be hard on the bad one. But at the same time, as you must own, it's not to be expected that I should submit to insulting language, especially from a man who is not worth a straw. Dear me, no; it's not to be expected.'

This earnest conversation was now interrupted by the entrance into the little shop of a telegraph-boy, who delivered a telegram with two double raps upon the counter.

'From Mr. Cheadle,' said Nedlicott, as soon as he had removed the envelope.

The telegram ran as follows:

*'Come to Tarmouth by the first train.'*

Ted Nedlicott was Mr. Cheadle's secretary. His duties were not, as the world goes, onerous, but he was expected to hold himself in readiness to obey orders at all hours of the day. Mr. Edwin Cheadle was a dramatic author, who was frequently seized with inspirations, for which there was only one remedy. At such moments he telegraphed to Nedlicott, who went without loss of time, and, by the aid of shorthand, effectually relieved him.

'I must be off at once,' said the secretary, putting sundry MSS., bound in brown paper, into a small black bag.

At an early age Nedlicott had developed a talent for histrionic affairs. As soon as he could read and write he had been

placed in a lawyer's office. Every penny that could be spared out of his earnings was expended in tickets to the galleries of theatres, and before many years he had gained a thorough knowledge of the capacity of every actor on the London boards. What first brought him under the notice of Mr. Cheadle was his caligraphy. The dramatist was struck with the handwriting of a letter which he received one day from his lawyers, and he asked leave to employ the writer to copy manuscript. By this means Nedlicott was brought into direct communication with Mr. Cheadle, who, gradually discovering his aptitude for stage business, offered him the post of secretary.

In the course of events Nedlicott became stage-manager at the theatre where Mr. Cheadle's comedies were produced, and

this was his position at the present time.

‘You will return this evening?’ said Mrs. Nedlicott, embracing her son.

‘My dear mother! did I ever leave you alone in the house all night?’

‘You are a good son,’ replied the mother.

‘What time I shall be back,’ said Nedlicott, ‘must rest with Mr. Cheadle. It is quite evident,’ he added, ‘that the sea-air at Tarmouth has invigorated his dramatic faculties. Depend upon it, he has hit upon some new and original idea for a comedy. I may be late.’

Nedlicott hastened out into the street, accompanied by the old Jew. As they walked along the great thoroughfare leading towards London Bridge, he must have compared the effect upon his senses of

the deafening roar of the heavy traffic, which now fell upon his ears, with the deep silence which had reigned in the same neighbourhood on the preceding night. While taking leave of Wildrake's landlord at the gateway, he glanced up at the old mansion in Gable Court: and the painful scene in which Wildrake had figured under the lamp was vividly recalled.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE NAME OF VALROY.

MR. EDWIN CHEADLE, the author of numerous plays, is pacing up and down a bright, airy room which presents an inspiring view of the sea. The sound of the waves breaking against the low cliff, close under the windows of the chalet, seems to delight his dramatic soul, for his look constantly melts into a jovial smile.

Outside the windows there is a balcony, towards which Mr. Cheadle now directs

his eyes. At the edge of the balcony a girl is standing ; her face is turned steadfastly seaward.

Between this girl and the horizon there is a small yacht leaping over rough waves : sometimes in a sunlit patch of sea, sometimes in a cloud-shadow, with showers of spray springing high against the bow. But, in shade or in sunshine, whether the sail be darkened by a cloud, or brightened by a flash of light, the boat always holds a steady, tacking course towards the harbour.

‘What a heroine!’ says the dramatist, stepping out upon the balcony.

The girl turns her head. She is tall and beautiful.

‘I mean,’ says Mr. Cheadle ; ‘the heroine for a comedy.’

A lady, languid in manner, crosses

from another window, and enters on the scene.

‘I think, Edwin,’ says she, raising her face to Mr. Cheadle’s, ‘that it would not be very difficult to point out the hero.’

‘The one on the sea?’ Mr. Cheadle demands, darting a glance at the yacht.

‘No. On the shore.’

The dark figure of a man is approaching from the cliff. Mr. Cheadle darts a glance towards this figure.

‘Roy Valroy?’

‘Yes.’

Mr. Cheadle’s face becomes even more expressive. He strides up and down the balcony; nods at the yacht; shakes his head playfully at Marion, and beams upon the languid lady, his young wife, who has seated herself, in a drooping attitude, beside the girl. The dramatist, advancing



to the balcony-stair, greets Roy Valroy, who ascends.

Valroy's face and manner are attractive : he is dark, and handsome, and looks about thirty.

Shaking hands with the little group, he remarks, in a grave tone :

'I have come—I am sorry to say' (this with a glance at Marion)—'to bid you good-bye.'

Mr. Cheadle's face grows serious.

'Valroy,' he protests, 'let us be candid ! This situation—from a dramatic point of view—pleases me. In comedy, an effective exit is not to be neglected : you agree with me, I know. Something exciting, I hope, calls you away ?'

'A letter from my brother.'

'Mystifying, I'll be bound ; eh ?'

'No. The letter is perfectly lucid in

every line. My brother is on his way home.'

'Sir Michael coming to England? Incomprehensible!'

Mr. Cheadle takes Roy Valroy's arm. He leads him to a seat, apart from the ladies, at the other end of the balcony.

'This news,' says he, 'suggests the comedy I want.'

He sits down, motioning his friend to a place at his side.

'The opening scene,' he continues, 'is, let us say, a balcony at Tarmouth. Yacht in the background; heroine in the foreground: enter hero. We need not at present,' adds Mr. Cheadle, 'mention names.'

A ray of sunlight, at this moment, flashing upon the yacht, the single sail glitters as if washed with silver: the little flag flaps

rapidly, and the boat leaps forward with greater speed. Mr. Cheadle glances at it, and then resumes.

‘The heroine’s father,’ says he, ‘hates the very name of the hero. The consequence is that the course of true love, in this comedy, will not run smooth—which leads me to hope,’ adds the dramatist, ‘that the play will be a success.’

‘Cheadle,’ says Valroy, ‘don’t carry your joke too far.’

‘What?’ Cheadle retorts. ‘Why, I mean to play a part myself: the hero’s friend! The heroine’s father I know well. Capital character! I’ve introduced him into one comedy already. There will be scenes between yourself and me. You know the part you will play?’

Roy Valroy rises from his seat beside the dramatist.

‘The part I shall play,’ he says, ‘will be to start for London. If you suppose,’ adds Valroy, ‘that any young lady of our acquaintance . . .’

‘We shall see,’ says Mr. Cheadle, with a prophetic nod.

The yacht, while they are speaking, reaches the entrance to the harbour. It begins to lower its sail. Lying in the stern, in a lazy attitude, is a young man in nautical attire, who scarcely seems to observe anything beyond the yacht. But suddenly he catches sight of Marion. Thereupon he springs nimbly to his feet, and, raising his eyes towards the balcony, salutes the girl with a courteous wave of the cap.

The yacht glides into the harbour. Marion Aldershaw stands motionless, her hands clasped, her face still as earnest as

when she was looking at the boat leaping over the waves far out at sea.

Roy Valroy directs an angry glance towards the yacht. Then he turns with impatience towards Mr. Cheadle.

‘It is time,’ says he, ‘that I took my leave.’

Valroy had no sooner gone, than Nedlicott, the secretary, arrived at the chalet, greatly to Mr. Cheadle’s satisfaction.

The scene changes. An old-fashioned dining-room, with windows that look out upon a great heath, in a suburb near London, is fast growing sombre; for the twilight is passing out of the sky. On the dark oaken walls hang the portraits of men and women of various periods. A grave judge of the eighteenth century in his judicial robes has an expression

of severity, as though pronouncing sentence on some unhappy prisoner at the bar; while a cavalier of Charles the First's time stands in a threatening attitude, his hand upon the hilt of his sword; even the smile upon the bewitching face of a lady, amongst this ancestral group, is serious, as though in sympathy with the faces around her.

Before the fire in an arm-chair is seated a small man with his handkerchief over his face. His hands are folded idly upon his lap, and his head is thrown backwards, so that the chin is pointed towards the ceiling. His slow respiration and the slow ticking of an old clock on the mantelshelf are the only sounds to be heard, chasing each other, as it were, over the space of silence.

In another chair sits Roy Valroy, looking moodily at the fire with knit

brow. The strong resemblance which he bears to more than one portrait on the sombre walls is noticeable even in this twilight.

Rising from his seat from time to time, he looks out of the window on the scene. Through the reddening leaves of autumn can be caught glimpses of the heath. The sun has gone down for an hour or more beyond this broad, open space; but the reflections in the sky, at the edge of the horizon, are brilliant still, though rapidly changing into fainter colours; while the heath, like a face from which life is passing away, becomes dusky, and then dark, as the shadow of night gradually spreads over it.

The small man raises the handkerchief from his face. He looks vacantly around him.

‘How restless you are, my learned friend,’ he remarks.

Valroy, turning from the window, throws himself into a chair.

‘As restless, Ludlaw,’ says he, ‘as a caged lion. I would go away to-night if my brother was not coming home. I want thorough change. I should like to start for Switzerland, and cross the Alps.’

‘Why,’ says Ludlaw, ‘you have just had a change : did not the sea-air agree with you ?’

‘That’s a question which I cannot answer yet ; I have no fixed opinion except about the Alps. Life seems purposeless, absolutely not worth living.’

‘A wretched sentiment,’ Ludlaw declares, ‘and one unworthy of you. Come,’ he adds, ‘if there is a lady in the question, why not say so ?’

Valroy makes no reply.



‘Be candid! If you could win her, heart and hand, would that keep you from climbing up Mont Blanc?’

Roy Valroy leans back in his chair.

‘I believe, Ludlaw, that you have guessed the truth.’

Ludlaw turns his keen eyes upon Valroy’s face.

‘In that case, my friend, may I be allowed to put one or two direct questions?’

Valroy nods carelessly at the fire.

‘Consider yourself placed,’ says Ludlaw, bending over an arm of his chair, ‘in the witness-box. Now, tell me, are you what is called a briefless barrister?’

Again Valroy nods.

‘I must request my learned friend to answer me. Yes, or no?’

‘Yes, I am.’

‘You are. Now—did you or did you not absent yourself from your chambers, and take a trip to the sea-side?’

‘I did.’

‘Do you remember the name of the town?’

‘Tarmouth.’

‘And why,’ says Ludlaw, ‘why, I must inquire, of all sea-side towns in the world, did you select Tarmouth?’

‘I think . . .’

‘No, my friend, you do not think! You either know, or else you do not know. Why did you choose Tarmouth? now, be careful.’

‘Why did I choose Tarmouth. Because I had a friend staying there.’

‘A lady or a gentleman?’

‘A gentleman.’

‘Married or single?’

‘Married.’

‘Ah! Can you recall his name?’

‘Edwin Cheadle.’

At this point in the cross-examination Ludlaw rises from his seat, and, standing with his back to the fire, leans towards Roy in a droll manner, and continues:

‘Now, on your oath,’ says he, beating time to his words impressively with his forefinger, ‘on your oath, sir! Did you, or did you not, know that Mr. and Mrs. Cheadle counted among their relations or friends, no matter which, a certain Miss Marion Aldershaw, a young lady eminently prepossessing, highly accomplished, and the daughter of a merchant prince?’

‘Yes. I have often heard Mrs. Cheadle speak of Miss Aldershaw as her cousin.’

‘Very good. Now, has Mrs. Cheadle

ever invited you to meet this said cousin at her house in London ?

‘Frequently.’

‘Have you ever accepted?’

‘Never.’

‘Now, one question more. Had you, or had you not, the slightest suspicion, when you started for Tarmouth, that Miss Marion Aldershaw was staying at that sea-side town on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Cheadle?’

‘No, certainly not.’

‘Now, be careful,’ admonishes Ludlaw, ‘and remember that you are still on your oath. If, sir, you had had the slightest suspicion that Miss Marion Aldershaw was at Tarmouth, would you have gone there?’

‘No!’

‘That will do;’ and Ludlaw resumes his seat.

As Ludlaw sits down, Valroy gets up and again begins to walk restlessly before the windows, looking out upon the lamps on the road over the common which shine brightly now.

‘I would rather have gone,’ Roy Valroy presently bursts forth, in a passionate tone, ‘to the Antipodes than have met that girl! Can I be in my right senses? It is impossible to think of anything but her: she is always in my thoughts. If Cheadle were to invite me back to Tarmouth, I should not have the strength to resist. In fact . . .’

‘That will do, my learned friend. Sit down and permit me to sum up.’

Valroy at once throws himself into his chair, and leaning forward, with his hands supporting his head, stares steadfastly at the fire once more.

‘I will try,’ Ludlaw begins, looking round upon the portraits as though they were an impaneled jury, ‘I will try to put the matter clearly before you : and, I need not add, without bias. You can then decide for yourself whether you have any chance of winning the hand of Miss Marion Aldershaw.’

After this short prelude Ludlaw pauses. Presently he resumes, in a low and impressive voice,

‘In my opinion,’ says he, ‘a great obstacle stands in the way. What—you naturally ask me—should cause an obstacle? An affair which before visiting Tarmouth was not, as far as you were concerned, worth recalling. But now it becomes one which must be referred to, and never forgotten. Shall we start from the time when Paul Aldershaw and your

brother were on terms of friendship?’

Roy Valroy answers with a nod, never changing his attitude.

‘Well, then, to begin! It so happens that there is in the city of London a great merchant prince named Paul Aldershaw. Not many years ago Mrs. Aldershaw, his wife, a brilliant woman as well as a beauty, reigned in Tyburnia like a queen.’

Folding his arms, and throwing back his head, Ludlaw adds, with a glance at Valroy :

‘And if Miss Marion Aldershaw resembles her mother I am not surprised to hear that you find her irresistible.’

Valroy shows a slight sign of impatience.

‘In Tyburnian society,’ Ludlaw continues, ‘your brother, Sir Michael Valroy, constantly appeared. He was a

young baronet then, who had seen the world, who knew everybody, and everything worth talking about. Of course the merchant prince welcomed him warmly. For was it not remarked that when Sir Michael Valroy was among the guests Mrs Aldershaw was most brilliant? Paul Aldershaw's friends were delighted; they could talk about the beautiful Mrs. Aldershaw, and about Sir Michael too, as people will talk about each other in society. You know what I mean.'

Pausing again and looking round upon the portraits, whose faces seemed to grow more solemn, as the fire threw reflections less frequently upon the walls, Ludlaw presently proceeds :

'This satisfactory state of Tyburnian society continued for two or three seasons. The gossip went on about Mrs. Aldershaw,



though it was beginning to lose its freshness. But one morning a startling report reached many of the Tyburnian breakfast-tables. Mrs. Aldershaw—so ran the rumour—had disappeared.’

The fire in the hearth grows duller now—the faces of the portraits still more solemn.

‘Society,’ pursues Ludlaw, ‘watched from its windows that morning, with eager faces for the merchant prince. He appeared: as if nothing had happened Paul Aldershaw stepped into his carriage, some said, with a firm step; but others declared that his manner was unsteady and that his face showed signs of distress. As if nothing had happened, he continued to drive away, every morning, to the city. Yes! even when the rumour of Mrs. Aldershaw’s disappearance was confirmed.’

Once more Ludlaw pauses, as though expecting some word from Roy Valroy ; but, as his friend still remains with his head between his hands, Ludlaw resumes :

‘To describe the disappointment in Tyburnia, when nothing serious resulted from this affair, would be difficult indeed ! A duel, somewhere on the French coast, between Paul Aldershaw and Sir Michael Valroy was talked of for some days ; and then Tyburnia began to listen for the report of the pistol with which Paul Aldershaw was expected to blow out his own brains : and, finally, Tyburnia glanced down the newspaper columns, hoping at least to discover something spicy about this mysterious business. But no satisfactory explanation was forthcoming. Society had to be satisfied with its own knowledge that Paul Aldershaw had begun to lead a retired life.

He was seldom seen, except when he entered his carriage to drive to his office in the City; and so people gradually ceased to take any special interest in him. The matter was soon forgotten; and the elderly gentleman, with grey hair and a slight stoop in his shoulders, was no longer talked about, or even observed, except as a merchant prince who had suffered a "blight" in his prime, but who was giving all his attention to business, and accumulating wealth for an only daughter to inherit.'

Looking at Roy Valroy again, as if expecting some comment, Ludlaw finds him still in the same attitude. He shows by the expression on his face that he is listening, and that is all.

'Now, the question is,' Ludlaw asserts, 'has Paul Aldershaw forgotten that affair?

Has he forgotten his wife, and, above all, has he forgotten the name of Valroy? All I can say about it is this: I knew Mr. Aldershaw intimately; and, judging from what I could of his character, I should be inclined to predict that the affair lives in his memory as freshly as if it had just happened. If you, as the brother of Sir Michael Valroy, went to him, and demanded his daughter's hand in marriage, he would not only refuse to give his consent, but he would convince you before the interview was over that he would rather see his daughter in her grave than the wife of any relation of the man who had done him so irreparable a wrong! He would not be influenced by any argument which you might bring forward to justify your right as a free citizen, who had never sinned against society, to

fall in love with his daughter. You bear the name of Valroy! That would be enough to create a prejudice against you which would destroy all sense of justice. My advice to you, therefore, my learned friend, is to forget as soon as possible that you have ever met the girl. Take a philosophical view of the subject, and go abroad; if you think such a severe remedy is necessary to effect a cure. But visit Paris, not the Alps. You will be back before a month is over, and laughing at your own folly. You will be as happy, in fact, and just as contented as you were before you met Miss Marion Aldershaw!

With these words, Ludlaw falls back in his arm-chair, settles himself into a comfortable attitude, and covers his head once more with his handkerchief; and he is soon breathing with the same regularity

as before ; while the old clock on the mantel-shelf seems suddenly to gain a hearing, and to be beating time to the breathing, though always running impatiently ahead and then falling back to start anew.

The shadow thrown upon the portraits appears to have gathered over the face of Roy Valroy too. He sits, his head still resting on his hands, looking into the red glow of the fire like one who expects to find the solution of a problem hidden somewhere there.

Meanwhile, along the road across the heath, where the lamps can be seen from the windows shining at long intervals, comes the carriage, at a rapid pace, which is bringing Sir Michael Valroy home after an absence from England of many years.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ENLIGHTENED.

IN the neighbourhood of St. Mary Axe, in the City of London, there was—and indeed still is—a dark and desolate old square; a place which is sombre from morning till night. Even at noon the sunlight never lingers very long upon the paved quadrangle; for, when entering between these tall and gloomy walls, the shadows are always ready to advance from nooks and corners to chase away the weak and straggling rays. From a lofty store-

house the deepest shadows fall over a rusty iron crane with an iron pulley and chains, not unlike a gibbet.

Opposite stands a stable, in shape resembling a gigantic barn, but it is as completely in ruins from roof to floor as though it had been shaken by an earthquake. On the other two sides of the square, facing each other, are old dwelling-houses, discoloured by many coatings of dust and smoke; houses which might be the haunts of men's ghosts rather than of men, for they retain no longer any appearance of homely comfort. The windows of these two rows of houses have a vacant stare which they direct towards each other. There are two staring windows on the ground-floor, on a level with the doorway, three upon the first floor, and three upon the second; and there are



two round garret-windows above, like sleepless eyes, with chimneys on each side, like ears which seem to be listening for the chimes from the old clock in the tower of St. Andrew Undershaft hard by.

It was a wintry night. In the centre of the square, in the midst of the shadows, a solitary lamp glimmered, but so dimly that it looked like the apparition of an extinguished light. The glass frame which surrounded it was broken and besmeared with mud, and around the feeble light the heaviest shadows seemed to congregate; and when a fitful gust of wind, which constantly rushed through the archway under the great store-house, swept round the square, and threatened to put out the flame, the shadows crept closer still, as though they were the shadows of huge wings.

With one of these fitful gusts, which passed more frequently through the archway into the square as the evening advanced, there came a man whose strange way of conducting himself gave the impression that he was being blown in against his will. His behaviour towards the gusts of wind was resentful ; he turned upon them sharply with a savage frown, and with clenched fists, sparring as though he were preparing for a pugilistic encounter. Dancing a few steps forward and then a few steps backward, sometimes giving his adversary his face and sometimes his back, he presently reached the second house to the right of the archway ; and there he stopped, leaning against the railings to recover breath.

By a glance at his face these signs of eccentricity were explained : the features,

as well as the arms and legs, seemed to be carrying on a fight, for there was a mental struggle at work in the man to regain a sober expression of countenance. His coat was threadbare, and his hands were lean ; and his fingers, long and thin with a nervous wriggling motion, like snakes, were continually twitching at his coat-collar. Having somewhat conquered his features, and steadied himself by striking his breast several times with his clenched hand, he went in at the open door facing him, on which was written in large letters on the centre panel :

*Aldershaw, Grimwade and Company.*

The office was small and gloomy ; but the clerks were numerous. They sat on imposingly high stools at a long desk, with the light of shaded lamps reflected on

their busy faces. Beyond this desk there was an elevated enclosure, through the wooden bars of which could be seen, seated under his own particular lamp a person with a tawny beard and with quick, bright eyes, who more closely resembled a playful lion than an industrious human being. He had several ledgers with him in the cage; and he was turning over the leaves briskly, and at intervals tugging at his beard. When his head went down he began to write in one of the books, and the fluttering would cease; but when his head went up the writing would stop, and the fluttering would begin again, as though the leaves had been caught in a sudden draught.

As nobody seemed to pay any attention to the entrance of the visitor, he took the opportunity of having another facial struggle. He took off his hat and placed

it on the counter before him, and his snaky fingers came stealthily out of his pockets and crept into his hair. Catching sight of this individual standing at the counter, the person in the cage stopped suddenly in the midst of a conflict with the leaves of the ledgers, and glared through the bars.

‘Is Mr. Paul Aldershaw within?’ the visitor ventured to enquire.

A boy with long legs, who was seated on a stool at a separate desk in a corner, on hearing a voice, jumped down and came up to the counter.

‘What is it?’ he demanded, curtly.

The visitor put his hand in his pocket, as though searching for a card-case; but nothing resulting he gave his collar a nervous tug, and said:

‘My name is Wildrake.’

At the mention of these words, all the clerks raised their eyes with sudden curiosity, while the boy opening a door close at hand, on which was inscribed *Mr. Grimwade* in rusty letters, said, with more respect in his tone :

‘ This way, sir, if you please.’

The room which Wildrake now entered was more like a mausoleum than an office. Upon a low shelf, which was ranged round the walls, were placed document-boxes, black with dust and age. On these boxes, to be deciphered with difficulty, were certain abbreviated inscriptions, having hieroglyphic reference to the documents within. In the centre of the office stood a desk, over which was suspended a shaded lamp ; and at this desk, it was evident, Mr. Grimwade had sat at some period in the history of

the firm. On a wooden stand, by itself, was another box, larger, more dusty, and more black than the others; and the inscription was so faint upon it that the words looked more like 'sacred to the memory of Elijah Grimwade' than anything else.

Wildrake was still staring thoughtfully at these curious figurings on the boxes, when the office-boy peeped in at a side door and invited him to step that way.

'Give Mr. Wildrake a chair'—the voice came from behind a pile of papers as the visitor entered an adjoining room—'give Mr. Wildrake a chair.'

Wildrake sat down and looked at a bald head, which was all that he could see of the gentleman who was writing at the table, and who continued to write

for some minutes without raising his face.

Wildrake waited patiently.

At length the gentleman laid down his pen, leaned back in his chair, and looked up inquiringly at his visitor.

‘Now, John Wildrake,’ said he, ‘what can we do for you?’

Moving nervously in his chair, Wildrake made no reply. He looked at his hat meditatively, and then at his boots; but he did not appear to gain any help from either.

‘The old story, I suppose. Eh, Wildrake?’

‘No, Mr. Aldershaw,’ said Wildrake, ‘not the old story, sir. Not, at least, if you mean that I have called upon you to-day to put your hand in your pocket. No, sir, not that.’



Mr. Aldershaw, who had a pale face with a passionless expression, except in his grey eyes, which were keen and restless, was in outward appearance as full of repose as if he had been a statue. His white hair lay on each side of his bald head, like closed wings. His chin appeared behind a collar which might have belonged to a marble bust. He sat with his elbows on the arms of his chair, clasping his hands, as though the reference which his visitor had made to a pocket prevented him from assuming any other attitude.

‘What I mean is,’ Wildrake continued, throwing his head on one side, ‘what I mean is that I’ve called to suggest something which the age wants badly.’

‘Money?’ remarked Mr. Aldershaw, promptly.

‘No,’ said Wildrake, ‘not money. That is not what I mean. The age wants reforming: the rising generation does not open its mouth.’

‘Surely,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, ‘that is as it should be.’

‘What I mean is,’ Wildrake repeated, nervously, ‘the rising generation does not speak out distinctly: no articulation! On that account, Mr. Aldershaw, it’s a failure.’

‘Possibly,’ said the merchant, with impatience, ‘and if my time . . .’

Wildrake leaned slightly forward, and raised his hand.

‘Permit me, Mr. Aldershaw,’ said he, ‘to make one remark. I am influenced entirely by philanthropic motives. Otherwise,’ he added, ‘I would not for a moment trespass upon your time. I

have only one question to ask. Why, I demand, why is the rising generation a failure?’

He paused with his head on one side, as though waiting for the reply with breathless expectation.

‘Because,’ he answered himself, in a persuasive tone, ‘it is not taught elocution.’

Wildrake looked at Mr. Aldershaw. But that gentleman maintaining silence he continued :

‘Now my plan,’ said he, ‘is very simple. I intend, as philanthropist, to aid the rising generation. I contemplate giving lessons.’

As Mr. Aldershaw had nothing to say against this communication, Wildrake, who did not appear to require encouragement, went on :

‘In a house,’ he said, ‘out of Thames Street, in fact in Gable Court, I have a third-floor front. The room has the merit, though not handsomely furnished, of being commodious ; plenty of space, sir, for the voice. The landlord, who has no articulation worth mentioning, has asked me to pay my rent. He is an ignorant and most insolent person. He has refused to accept my pamphlet on elocution. He declares that he has no faith in words. I have even offered him lessons gratis, sir, actually gratis. But nothing will satisfy him, except a ten-pound note.’

Mr. Aldershaw pressed a hand-bell on the desk at his side.

‘Tell Mr. Snowby,’ said he, when a clerk appeared, ‘that I wish to speak to him.’

Snowby, who was the person Wildrake

had observed in the cage with the large ledgers, entered the room with an air of suppressed importance. He looked inquiringly from Mr. Aldershaw to Wildrake.

‘Snowby,’ said the merchant, with a wave of his hand, ‘this is Mr. Wildrake. You may possibly have heard the name.’

Snowby assented with a slight inclination of the head.

‘Mr. Wildrake,’ the merchant continued, ‘is a man of enterprise. He is established in Gable Court, in the neighbourhood of Thames Street. But, as I understand, the necessary capital—for reasons which it is needless to mention—does not appear to be forthcoming. The consequence is, Snowby,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, ‘that we must put the affair in your hands, and ask you to tide over this temporary

inconvenience for Mr. Wildrake. What do you say?’

Snowby looked searchingly into Mr. Aldershaw’s face; suppressed a smile, and replied promptly :

‘I can only say, sir, that if Mr. Wildrake will walk into Mr. Grimwade’s room, I have no doubt that I shall be able to arrange something satisfactory.’

As he spoke, Snowby went towards Mr. Grimwade’s door. He opened it and looked in.

‘One moment, Snowby,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, lifting his hand. ‘It is only right that I should say a word in Mr. Wildrake’s favour. He is a man of business. I found him here, a clerk in this very office, when I left college and was taken into partnership by my father some thirty-five years ago. John

Wildrake,' he continued, glancing towards his visitor, 'might have been taken into the house also. He would, in fact, when my father died, have filled the place of junior partner, if he had chosen to remain with us. But he preferred a position which was—well, more independent. And whose fault is it if it has not proved more lucrative? Not John Wildrake's. No, surely not! I have always been so accustomed to look upon Mr. Wildrake as a thorough man of business that I cannot persuade myself that he would have resigned his position in a house like ours unless he was confident as anyone can be that, in some other enterprise, he would become more quickly a millionaire.'

Mr. Aldershaw's words seemed to make a painful impression upon Wildrake; for, as the merchant proceeded, he changed colour,

and his nervous manner increased. He had risen from his seat, but, instead of now following the manager, he turned to Mr. Aldershaw, and said, in a shaky voice,

‘Allow me, sir, to say one word.’ He glanced at Snowby and added, ‘I will follow this gentleman immediately.’

At a nod from Mr. Aldershaw, the manager retired into Mr. Grimwade’s room. As soon as they were alone, Wildrake turned quickly towards the merchant.

‘If you knew,’ said he, ‘and I have never doubted until now that you did know, why I became incompetent to retain my place in your house, you would not have spoken as you did a moment ago.’

Wildrake uttered these words rapidly: he was trembling with agitation.

‘I think,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, ‘that we both know the reason well enough.’



Wildrake placed his hand upon the back of a chair to steady himself, and replied :

‘ You mean that I took to drinking ?’

The merchant remained significantly silent.

‘ Yes, Mr. Aldershaw,’ said Wildrake, ‘ there is truth in that: but there was another reason. I drank to forget my grief.’

‘ If you were in difficulties, Wildrake,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, kindly, ‘ you had only to mention them to me.’

‘ That,’ Wildrake quickly assented, ‘ I have every reason to believe. But there are troubles which men shrink from mentioning to their best friends—even after many years.’

A slight shade passed over Mr. Aldershaw’s face.

‘You may remember, sir,’ said Wildrake, ‘that I had a daughter.’

The merchant looked up with surprise.

‘Why, surely,’ said he, ‘you have not lost her?’

‘Yes. She is lost.’

‘Why,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, ‘you told me, years ago, that your daughter was married.’

‘I told everyone the same—happily married, Mr. Aldershaw, were my words.’

As he spoke, a look of dreadful pain came into Wildrake’s face.

‘But,’ said the merchant, ‘do you mean to say that she is dead?’

‘No, not dead, sir,’ said Wildrake, ‘not dead.’

There was a pause. Then he added, looking strangely round the room,

‘I know that she is not dead, although

I never see her. I know that she is not dead, sir, because I sometimes hear her footstep. It haunts me.'

He again looked strangely about. Suddenly a fierce and fixed look gathered in his eyes.

'Now,' he muttered, with clenched fists — 'I hear her footstep now.'

He stepped softly, as though fascinated, towards the window, and moved the blind aside. He peered out into the dark square.

'Why do I never see her?' he demanded, in a low, distracted tone. 'I know it's her footstep which I hear. I listened to it when she was a child.'

He came slowly back to where he had stood, still deeply moved.

'When she first left me,' he said, twitching nervously at his coat collar, 'I so

often heard her footstep that I could not believe that she had gone. But gradually the truth forced itself upon me. I gave up all hope ; I knew that she was lost.'

Mr. Aldershaw looked earnestly at Wildrake, and then thoughtfully bent his head.

'I never heard anything of this,' said he.

Wildrake made no reply. The merchant continued :

'I recollect your daughter perfectly,' said he. 'She was a very handsome and well-educated girl. She had the voice of a *prima donna*. I remember that she sang at our receptions. When you told me,' he added, 'that she was married, I naturally concluded that she had made a good match, as I always believed she would.'

‘Her ambition was to marry a baronet,’ said Wildrake, significantly. ‘It was her one fault: she looked above her station in life.’

He moved a step nearer to Mr. Aldershaw, and added:

‘We went into society a good deal. One evening—I remember it well—she met the man who has caused me this grief. She met him at your house.’

Mr. Aldershaw rose slowly from his chair. He looked at Wildrake with a stern face.

‘At my house?’ said he; and there was anger in his tone. ‘What was his name?’

Wildrake glanced round him rapidly. Then, in a broken voice, and scarcely above a whisper, he said:

‘Sir Michael Valroy.’

The name seemed to strike upon Mr. Aldershaw's ear as though he had received a blow. He bent his head, and his passionless face shrank and wrinkled with passion. Even Wildrake grew alarmed at the sudden change in the merchant prince.

Paul Aldershaw sank into his chair. With a wave of his hand he dismissed Wildrake, who, casting a meaning glance at the merchant, stepped into the late Mr. Grimwade's office, and softly closed the door. He found Snowby, the manager, standing there, with a searching look in his eyes, waiting to arrange the small matter of business which his employer had placed in his hands.

## CHAPTER V.

## MARION'S HEART.

It was an hour or more after Wildrake had gone that Paul Aldershaw left his office. But as he descended the dark staircase, and passed out into the dismal old square, he glanced about him nervously, as though expecting at every step to encounter the grief-stricken, drunken face of his old clerk. He peered among the dense shadows which seemed to have deepened in every nook and corner as the night had closed in ; while the lamp, in

the centre of the place, looked as though it had been lost in a thick fog. The merchant's carriage stood at the entrance to the square, under the archway below the great storehouse. Paul Aldershaw took his seat with a certain sense of relief; although, as he was driven through the crowded streets towards Tyburnia, he fancied more than once that he saw the figure of Wildrake at gloomy corners, bent in a listening attitude, as he had seen him when haunted by the sound of his daughter's footstep.

Paul Aldershaw had invited a few people to dinner. The party was composed of some half-a-dozen men: two or three City magnates, a captain in the Horse Guards, and Lord Mounthaw and his son Viscount Dwyver.

The Earl of Mounthaw was an old



friend. His property in Yorkshire adjoined an estate which Paul Aldershaw's father had purchased years ago. As young men, therefore, the present Lord Mount-haw and Paul Aldershaw had met every autumn, during the shooting season, and had become intimately acquainted. As time went on, a tacit understanding came to exist between the two men that their children—viz.: Marion Aldershaw and Viscount Dwyver—should some day form a matrimonial alliance.

Before the first guest was announced, Paul Aldershaw had taken up his position on the hearthrug in the great drawing-room with his back to the fire, as if warming himself up for the reception. But he looked almost as cold as marble, if not as pale; for his face had regained its passionless expression, and there was no

indication, except in his unquiet eyes, that his mind had been so seriously disturbed scarcely an hour ago. If Wildrake's words, or his troubled look, still gave him uneasiness, he had concealed the fact from himself for the time being. He was the wealthy Mr. Aldershaw now, a man who acknowledged no worldly anxieties, no cares.

Before long the guests arrived. They were welcomed courteously by the merchant prince, though no trace of a smile escaped his lips.

‘I hear,’ he said, turning to Viscount Dwyver, soon after they were all assembled at dinner, ‘I hear that you saw something of my daughter while you were at Tarmouth with your yacht?’

Dwyver was a good-looking man of twenty-four, or thereabouts, with all the

brightness and energy of youth expressed in every feature: and, to judge from his manner and his mode of conversation, he took a superlative view of everything and everybody claiming his attention.

‘I had,’ said he, ‘the pleasure of meeting Miss Aldershaw every day. I was absolutely enchanted, I assure you. Immensely gratified.’

‘She was looking well?’

‘In a most perfect state of health,’ said Dwyver. ‘Positively perfect.’

One of the City magnates now asked Dwyver some questions about his yacht, which led to a long discussion—principally carried on between the viscount and the Horse Guards-man—on the subject of regattas. When Mr. Aldershaw at length managed to wedge in a word, he turned the current of conversation by asking

Lord Mounthaw what he thought of the prospects of the shooting season this autumn in Yorkshire.

Lord Mounthaw was a square-built man, with a fresh complexion; he had the strong ruddy appearance of a Yorkshire squire. He was a true sportsman, with a quick eye and a steady hand.

‘The season,’ said he, ‘will be good. I hope,’ he added, ‘that we shall see you and Marion at Mounthaw Castle on the first.’

The merchant prince could not promise. He had given up shooting, as Lord Mounthaw was aware. But he should be ‘at Oaklands’ (his seat in Yorkshire), he said, ‘before the end of the season.’ That was certain.

The conversation then drifted into sport, and from sport into politics: and,

before the leading questions before parliament had been exhaustively discussed, the merchant prince proposed an adjournment to the smoking divan adjoining the billiard-room.

During a billiard match, which was played between Dwyver and the captain, Lord Mounthaw and the merchant prince found themselves alone.

The divan was a room furnished in Oriental fashion with luxurious lounges, and with rugs and carpets which Paul Aldershaw had bought in Turkey during one of his visits to the East. The two friends sat on a lounge looking out upon a conservatory filled with sub-tropical plants.

After smoking for some minutes in silence, Lord Mounthaw turned to the merchant, and said :

‘So Marion is still at Tarmouth?’

‘Yes. Still with her cousins, you know, the Cheadles.’

‘She has been away some weeks?’

‘Several weeks,’ said the merchant.

‘Ah!’ said the earl, ‘Lady Mounthaw was saying to me, only this afternoon, how disappointed she was not to have seen anything of Marion this season.’

‘Lady Mounthaw,’ said the merchant, ‘is very kind.’

‘Why should you say that? The affection which Lady Mounthaw has for Marion is, as you must be aware, very deep. You must not forget that she has known her since she was a child. If Marion were Lady Mounthaw’s daughter she might be more demonstrative, but her affection could not be more sincere.’

‘I cannot doubt that.’

‘Lady Mounthaw,’ continued the earl, ‘has more than once begged me to talk to you, my dear Aldershaw, about Marion. You see, we have got a son, an only son. He is a good fellow, as you will be the first to admit. But he is so restless. He is so disinclined to settle down. Now supposing, let us say supposing, that he showed signs of an attachment for Marion, would such a contingency meet with your approval? I need scarcely assure you,’ Lord Mounthaw hastened to add, ‘that it would meet with Lady Mounthaw’s and mine.’

‘Mounthaw,’ said the merchant, holding out his hand, ‘it would not only meet with my approval: anything that I can possibly do in order to promote Lady Mounthaw’s wishes in this matter shall be done. Of course,’ pursued Paul Alder-

shaw, diplomatically, 'I cannot answer for Marion's heart. But I have every reason to believe that it is free; and, if your son can win her, I shall be the first to congratulate him, and to assure him that there is no man living to whom I would more willingly intrust my daughter's happiness.'

The ice was broken. The merchant prince and Lord Mounthaw could now freely converse together on a subject which was of such vital interest to both.

'I've a great mind,' said Mr. Aldershaw, when Lord Mounthaw was on the point of taking his leave, 'I've a great mind to run down to Tarmouth to-morrow. It would be a pleasant little surprise for Marion.'

'Ah,' said the earl, 'it would indeed.'



May I tell Lady Mounthaw,' he added, 'that you are going to bring Marion back with you?'

'I think so,' said the merchant, reservedly. 'Yes, I really think you may.'

Long after his guests had left him that night, Paul Aldershaw sat in his oriental room, singularly thoughtful for a man who seldom indulged in dreams. For a brief hour not even the remembrance of Wildrake's visit to his office, and the hateful name he had mentioned there, could disturb him. He was mentally gloating over the brilliant future which this contemplated alliance with the earl's family foreboded. The two properties in Yorkshire, as he had long and earnestly desired, would ultimately become one superb estate; and his daughter Marion, his only

child, would some day be the Countess of Mounthaw.

Paul Aldershaw had, it is true, inherited a large fortune. But, since the year in which he found himself the sole surviving partner in the great house, he had vastly developed the business of the firm. He had of late years given his undivided attention to commerce, though in former days he had shown a great interest in art: himself an artist, he had filled his house with valuable works by old masters; nor did he fail to patronise the modern school. But, since domestic troubles had overtaken him, from morning until night he had been immersed in city affairs. Art was forgotten: the merchant's one idea was to become a millionaire. His talents as a financier were known and acknowledged throughout Europe; and yet he

had laboured, and gained this position, less for the sake of accumulating riches than as a necessary diversion. But he now began to perceive that he had unconsciously laboured for some more worthy end, and that the power which his wealth had brought him would be turned to good account.

On the following day Paul Aldershaw drove to the City with a brighter look upon his face than had been seen there for years. Snowby, the manager, who had a better opportunity than most men of watching the changes in the merchant's countenance, was puzzled to account for it until towards the afternoon, when, being called into the private office, he had some reason to imagine that he might take all the credit of this alteration to himself.

‘By-the-by, Snowby,’ said the merchant, ‘it is time we were thinking of changing your position in the office. You are a man in whom I have for a long time placed very great confidence. Something must be done.’

Snowby could not utter a word.

‘To-day,’ said Mr. Aldershaw, ‘I have not a moment to spare. I am going out of town: to Tarmouth, in fact. But we must have a little talk together some day. Something shall be done. That room,’ he added, ‘of the late Mr. Grimwade’s might be dusted. You shall occupy his office. I wish to recognise your devotion to the firm.’

It was not the first time that Paul Aldershaw had referred to the dusting of Mr. Grimwade’s room; its neglected, gritty condition had evidently impressed

itself upon his mind, and Snowby, who was as quick to interpret the merchant's slightest utterance as he was to read his face, saw himself, the present manager, in the dim future installed at the late Mr. Grimwade's desk, a junior partner in the great house.

He thanked Mr. Aldershaw in appropriate words, and was stepping towards the door when the merchant stopped him.

'Snowby,' said he, 'have you seen Wildrake again?'

'No, sir,' said Snowby, 'I have seen nothing of him.'

'Have you his address?'

'Yes. It is on the draft, which he gave me, for the ten pounds.'

'How is the bill dated?'

'At one month.'

The merchant reflected for a moment.

‘When it falls due,’ said he, ‘arrange to call for payment yourself.’

‘Certainly,’ said the manager. ‘But,’ he added, with a shrewd look, ‘I doubt if it will be met.’

‘It will not be met,’ said Paul Aldershaw. ‘In fact, it is possible that Wildrake will borrow more money. If he does,’ added the merchant, ‘you can let him have some. Indeed, I should be glad if you would look after him now and then.’

‘It shall be done, sir,’ said Snowby.

‘Yes. Look after him,’ repeated the merchant, abstractedly. ‘A man of John Wildrake’s character demands it. He is dangerous to society.’

Snowby assented.

‘Now it appears,’ said the merchant, confidentially, ‘that Wildrake has, or fancies

that he has, a grievance against somebody : a very heavy grievance.'

Pausing, for a moment with a graver look on his face, he added :

' In fact, the fellow will be communicative : drunkards always are. He will tell you about a daughter who has been led astray ; and there may be some truth in his story. He is therefore to be pitied. Besides,' Paul Aldershaw concluded, ' as a former clerk in this house, it is our duty to look after him. In plain words, Snowby, if the thing is possible we must keep him out of mischief.'

When Paul Aldershaw left his office he drove to his club, instead of returning to Tyburnia. Here he dined, before starting for Tarmouth, mindful of his intention, as he had declared to Lord Moun-

thaw, to give Marion a pleasant little surprise.

At Tarmouth it is a moonlight night. The windows of Mr. Cheadle's room at the chalet are wide open; the sea-breeze, blowing from the south, is as mild as in midsummer. The stars are brilliant, for there is scarcely a cloud in the sky.

Mr. Cheadle is seated at his table, pen in hand, engaged in constructing his new comedy. But he is not so deeply absorbed but that he can frequently find time to cast a meaning glance towards the balcony. His pretty wife is asleep in an arm-chair, in a dark corner of the room, with a novel on her lap. She never disturbs Mr. Cheadle's dramatic inspirations.

On the balcony, side-by-side, are Marion Aldershaw and no other than Roy Valroy.



The path of light upon the water, reaching from the horizon towards the beach, divides the waves into two restless seas. The white breakers are dashing monotonously against the cliff below the balcony. No other sound can be heard along the shore.

‘While I was away,’ Valroy is saying to Marion, in a low voice, ‘I was thinking deeply, very deeply, of something which I cannot any longer keep from you. Something which I had intended speaking of when I saw you last. Will you listen to me now?’

He looks into Marion’s face. There is a quivering of her lips, but no word reaches Valroy’s ear.

‘I do not wish,’ Valroy pursues, conscious of her distress, ‘to give you pain. But when shall we be alone again, as we

are now? This may be the last time for many months to come. I cannot let the chance go by without telling you that I love you.'

She bends her head, and turns it from him. But she raises her hand slowly, as though groping in the dark. Valroy seizes the hand and holds it in his own. He whispers very softly :

'Do you love me?'

Marion looks round. The moonlight trembles in her dark eyes as she raises them to Valroy's face.

'Yes,' says she, in a whisper like his own. 'No one but you.'

The tone in which he answers, 'Dear Marion!' makes her heart beat fast. For a while they are both silent. Marion's eyes are bent intently upon the moonlit path over the waves as though it were

the way, in a dream, to some splendid destiny.

‘Why did you say just now,’ Marion presently inquires, in a subdued voice, ‘that this might be the last time that we should meet for many months to come?’

Valroy feels a pang at his heart.

‘Do you wish to know to-night? You will learn that soon enough, Marion, without me.’

Marion becomes thoughtful.

‘It is not wrong to love you?’ says she. ‘Is it, Roy?’

This is the first time that she has called him by his Christian name. It is a new sensation to him: it is so sweetly and so timidly pronounced.

‘No, Marion.’

‘And yet,’ Marion confesses, ‘I have a

strange presentiment. Something seems to tell me that in loving you I shall displease my father. But it is too late now,' she hastens to add, 'to think of that—too late.'

While speaking, Marion has kept her eyes fixed upon the sea. Suddenly she hears a voice in Mr. Cheadle's room: a voice which startles her. She looks quickly round.

She sees her father: he is stepping towards the dramatist, who, with a genial smile, takes his hand.

'Where is Marion?'

This is his first question as he glances about the room.

'Balcony,' says Mr. Cheadle, curtly, and with a wave of his hand towards the windows. 'Sea in the background. Moonlight.'

Marion's father frowns.

‘But,’ says he, with surprise, ‘my daughter is not alone.’

‘No,’ says Mr. Cheadle. ‘That—from a dramatic point of view—would never do.’

‘What do you mean? Speak plainly.’

There is anger in the father's voice. He quickly adds :

‘Is it Lord Dwyver?’

‘No.’

‘Who, then?’

Marion sees Mr. Cheadle give a rapid glance towards the balcony, and then into her father's face.

‘Sit down, Aldershaw,’ says he, soothingly, ‘and I will tell you who.’

Her father slowly takes a seat and regards the dramatist with sternness and suspicion.

‘I’ll not attempt,’ says Mr. Cheadle, ‘to deceive you. I’m a slave—from a dramatic point of view—to situation. I must, so to speak, breathe an atmosphere of comedy. It’s necessary to my existence. I’ve invited some one to my house whom you—except from a dramatic point of view—could not desire your daughter to meet.’

Marion sees her father’s face grow sterner.

‘Don’t try my patience, Cheadle. I have asked you to tell me his name.’

‘One moment,’ says the dramatist; ‘I am coming to that. You will be justly indignant; and I wish you to understand that I am to blame: no one else. I plead guilty and crave your pardon. His name is Roy Valroy.’

Marion sees her father’s face wrinkle

and grow dark : she can scarcely recognise it, so disfigured does it become with passion. He springs from his chair and takes a step towards the windows.

But he has not time to cross the room before Marion is at his side. He looks at her with cruel severity, falls back and sinks into his chair.

Mr. Cheadle closes the windows and draws the curtains with great dramatic promptness, and stands before the drapery with folded arms.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE MANAGER AT HOME.

THE interest in John Wildrake which Snowby began to experience as soon as the responsibility of 'keeping him out of mischief' was imposed upon him by the merchant prince, was equalled only by his concern regarding the precious dust which had been so long preserved in the late Mr. Grimwade's office.

These two subjects frequently demanded serious reflection. On his way home to Brixton the manager could think of no-



thing else; they were subjects which threatened to become of supreme importance to him, and in some inexplicable manner, as it seemed, fatally connected; for, without any logical reason for drawing such a conclusion, Snowby argued that, if Wildrake 'came to grief' through neglect on his part, the dust would be let to go on accumulating; but that if no disaster overtook the old clerk, Mr. Grimwade's 'dust' would eventually be got rid of, and the faded name upon the panel outside his door would be removed, and his own name written there instead.

The 'little place,' as Snowby called his villa at Brixton, was among a row of detached little places with square gardens in front, and with gravel walks and flowerbeds like toy parks. So closely did these bijou residences resemble each other in

every detail, on both sides of the road, that looking from end to end was like peeping into opposite mirrors ; for they were mere reflections, the one row of the other. The trees which were planted at regular intervals on each side of the way, in the style of a boulevard, were not remarkable for luxuriant growth ; but there were enough branches to attract numberless sparrows, that twittered loudly, as if satisfied that by some accident they had found their way into the country.

‘Where is Miss Kate?’ said Snowby, meeting the servant-girl in the hall, as he let himself into his villa with his latch-key.

‘With Madame Hélène, sir.’

Snowby nodded approvingly as he stepped into his sitting-room, and then added :

‘Tell Miss Kate that I have come home.’

The room which Snowby entered was small. It was connected, however, by folding-doors with another of the same size. From the windows of the front one there was a view of the ‘boulevard;’ but from the other was to be seen, over an oblong garden, an extensive area of cabbage fields beyond which the sun was setting behind an atmosphere of London smoke.

Snowby had scarcely taken a turn across the room when a young girl made her appearance, and ran like a child into his arms.

She was about eighteen years of age, and one of the brightest looking girls imaginable. She had large, laughing eyes, a perfect rosebud of a mouth, and brown wavy hair lit up with a golden tint

which seemed to be stray sunshine. Her features were small and delicately formed, and her figure was so well proportioned that she appeared smaller than she actually was. There was something indescribably expressive in her hands ; they attracted almost as much attention as her face. They were such busy hands, so constantly in motion, so white and long, and dimpled too like her cheeks.

‘Father,’ said she, with her hands placed tenderly on Snowby’s shoulders and with her red lips raised for a kiss, ‘what a good-tempered face you have brought home this evening. Has anything remarkable happened at the office?’

‘Why, yes, Kate, my dear,’ said her father, ‘something remarkable has, or I should say, is going to happen.’

Kate placed her arm in her father’s, and

clasping her hands, and glanced up laughingly, she said :

‘Come down into the “snuggery,” and tell me all about it while I make the tea.’

The ‘snuggery,’ as Kate called it, was a little parlour below stairs, next to the kitchen. It was half above ground and half below, so that standing at the window you found your eyes on a level with the front garden, with a small railed area intervening.

When Kate had placed her father in the arm-chair, and had given the kettle a playful bump on the top of a cheerful fire, she began to lay the cloth in a busy, bustling manner, singing snatches of songs. She took from the cupboard sundry cups and saucers and plates, not forgetting to give her parent a smile each time she caught

his eye. During one of these expeditions Snowby, impatient with his news, commenced by saying:

‘Well, Kate, my dear, the fact is . . . .’

‘Wait a minute, father,’ cried Katie, ‘I’ve forgotten the teapot;’ and she hastened into the kitchen to search for that important commodity.

When she presently returned, he began again.

‘The fact is, my dear . . . .’

‘Now, let me make the tea first,’ said Kate, glancing at the kettle, ‘the water is boiling; and if your news is very surprising I shall scald myself as sure as fate. Only wait half-a-minute now, father, and I will come and sit down, with nothing to do but to pour out your tea and to listen to the latest news.’

When these preparations were at last

completed, and Kate had cut the bread and poured out the tea, she settled down with a merry look, and said :

‘I am ready now, father, to give you all my attention.’

Snowby stirred his tea, and then fixed his eyes earnestly upon his daughter.

‘What should you say,’ he demanded, ‘what should you say to an important change : to a change, my dear, in our social, indeed, I may say in our financial position?’

Kate glanced up quickly with a puzzled face.

‘What should I say, father?’

‘Ay, Katie,’ said he, ‘what should you say supposing that instead of living as we do in a small house, and letting our first floor, we had a fine house in the west-end in one of the squares, and a box at the

opera for the season? What should you say if, instead of the Brixton bus, we had our own carriage, drove in Hyde Park, and received no end of company?’

‘I do not understand,’ said Kate.

‘Then,’ said Snowby, ‘I will explain myself more clearly. All this has been offered in prospective: all that a man can desire in the way of wealth has been promised me to-day by Mr. Paul Aldershaw. In a word: Mr. Grimwade’s room is going to be dusted.’

As he finished speaking Snowby’s eyes sparkled, and he looked triumphantly into his daughter’s face to watch the effect of his last words.

Katie did not even smile. After a pause, she simply said:

‘Is that all, father?’

Snowby’s face expressed sudden surprise.



‘All, my dear?’ said he. ‘Does not the news content you?’

Katie made no reply.

‘Why, there is scarcely a man on ’Change,’ said her father, ‘who will not grow envious when he hears about it. Ever since Mr. Grimwade’s death, which occurred, you know, more than half-a-century ago, the great question on ’Change has been: who will occupy the vacant place in Grimwade, Aldershaw and Company’s office? It is the direct road to wealth. It means that if I live to reach Mr. Paul Aldershaw’s age—no very great age to reach, after all—I shall be, like him, a very rich man, and you, Kate, an heiress. Why, Katie,’ he concluded, ‘what more would you have?’

Still Katie did not answer.

‘You will, of course,’ her father went on,

with enthusiasm, 'marry a man of position. There is no reason, when we have a house in Belgrave Square, why you should not. Such things have happened. Why not again?'

Katie's eyes were bent thoughtfully to the ground: she did not even raise them when her father paused as though expecting some reply.

'Your education has not been neglected,' pursued Snowby, reflectively, 'and you are beginning to improve your music and your French in the society of Madame Hélène. And as to beauty,' he added, with a look of pride, 'I defy anyone to point me out a prettier girl.'

Rising at last from her seat, Katie went to her parent's side, and leaned over him with her arm around his neck.

'Father,' said she, 'I am more than con-

tented here. I wish for nothing better than to live in this little home with you, where we have lived alone so long and so happily.'

She touched his forehead with her lips, and then slowly sat down before the fire at his feet and rested her arm upon his knee.

'In a grand house,' she pleaded, in a low voice, 'we should never be together like this. There would be servants waiting upon us, and watching our movements at every step, until we grew ashamed to own that we loved each other. There would be visitors to entertain, and dinner-parties to give; and the people would not care for us, any more, I am afraid, than we should care for them. I should grow weary of life, father; would not you?'

A look of disappointment crossed Snow-

by's face, but he answered his daughter in a cheerful voice, as he stroked her hair caressingly.

‘Well, well, my dear,’ said he, ‘you are young, still very young; there is plenty of time. You do not understand yet the advantages of being rich. You do not understand. Besides,’ he added, ‘nothing definite has been settled. Mr. Grimwade’s room cannot be dusted in a day. It will be early enough to question our good fortune after the deed of partnership has been signed. Meanwhile, Katie, you can talk over the subject with Madame Hélène. She is evidently a woman of the world.’

‘That may be,’ said Katie, thoughtfully; ‘but no argument would convince me that all the wealth of London would make us happier than we are now.’

Not wishing, apparently, to urge the matter further, Snowby changed the subject by inquiring,

‘How do you like our new lodger?’

‘I think Madame H  l  ne charming,’ said Katie, ‘and we are great friends already. She seems quite delighted at the idea of helping me with my music. We have been playing and singing together all the afternoon.’

‘She has a fine voice,’ said Snowby, ‘certainly, a very fine voice.’

‘Yes, father,’ said Kate; ‘singing is her profession.’

‘Indeed!’

‘So she told me to-day,’ said Kate. ‘In fact, she has been quite confidential.’

‘Ah!’ said Snowby. ‘Now, I wonder who she is.’

‘She did not precisely tell me that,’ said Kate. ‘But she told me that she was alone in the world, and that she had lived many years in Paris, where she had made her living by singing and by teaching music.’

‘But you do not know who she is?’

‘No, father,’ said Kate. ‘Beyond this, she told me nothing: but I am sure from her manner and her conversation that she is a lady.’

‘Unquestionably, my dear,’ said Snowby. ‘She referred me to her bankers in Paris. I believe Madame Hélène to be highly respectable.’

‘No one could have doubted that, father,’ said Kate.

‘There, my dear,’ said Snowby, ‘you are wrong. In business, we doubt that people are respectable until we have been

furnished with their credentials. Our first floor apartments were to let: Madame Hélène applied for them. I suggested that it was customary to exchange references. Madame Hélène was quite agreeable. The references satisfied both parties, and the matter was settled; and,' added Mr. Aldershaw's manager, 'I am very pleased to think it has; for I have wished for some time past that my little girl could find a suitable companion during the hours I am compelled to be away from home.'

Katie now rose from her place at her father's feet, and gave him a playful embrace.

'Shall we pay Madame Hélène a visit this evening?' said she. 'I know that she would be delighted—indeed, she said she should—if we went to her room and

had a little music. She admires your voice very much, father. In fact, I should make you quite vain if I told you half she has said about it.'

Snowby chuckled with delight. After his day in the city, the manager's greatest pleasure was to hear his own voice. Scarcely an evening went by without some music; for Katie was as willing to accompany her father upon the piano as he was to sing his songs: the consequence was that Snowby had a *répertoire* sufficiently varied and extensive to have satisfied a tenor at the opera. He readily agreed to Kate's proposal that they should 'go up' to Madame Hélène's 'apartments,' as he called them; and they presently mounted the staircase arm-in-arm and knocked modestly at their lodger's door.

Madame Hélène, who was seated at the



piano when they entered, rose to welcome her visitors. She was not very young: thirty-five may have been about her age, for her handsome features were marked with that strength of expression which only makes its stamp upon a woman's face with time; and seldom even then unless she has seen the world and suffered. Her eyes were still bright and beautiful; but what a depth of sadness seemed to lie buried there even when she smiled!

‘We have come,’ said Snowby, when they were seated, ‘we have come to petition you to sing to us, Madame Hélène. Music, as you know, is my hobby after business hours; so, since you have given us some encouragement, you must be prepared to find us rather troublesome.’

Madame Hélène assured him that his visits could not be too frequent: that what

she wanted was an appreciative audience.

‘But,’ she added, ‘I shall not be satisfied, Mr. Snowby, unless you sing on all occasions when you come to see me.’

Snowby laughingly declared that he would not hide his talent under a bushel : and thus a pleasant evening commenced. Katie played and sang in her homely style with taste and simplicity : a little nervous in the presence of Madame Hélène, but this was a charm rather than a defect. Then with what pride she played the accompaniments to her father’s songs ! and with what confidence he sang them ! How energetically he raised himself on tiptoe when he appeared in danger of not reaching the high notes, and how careful he was to bend down, with his nose almost on a level with the music, when he came to the low ones !

Then, what could have surpassed their rapture when Madame Hélène sat down to the piano and began that song which has touched so many hearts, that simple melody of ‘Home, Sweet Home!’ They listened to a true artist whose emotion seemed to them so real that tears started into their eyes as she proceeded; perhaps all the more readily because they knew the music and the words so well and acknowledged the song to be their favourite air.

When it was finished, and Madame Hélène had closed the music-book, neither ventured to utter a word.

Snowby was the first to break the silence.

‘By-the-by,’ said he, ‘talking of “Home, Sweet Home,” reminds me, Katie, that I shall be out one evening soon until some-

what later than usual. For the fact is, I have undertaken a little private business for Mr. Aldershaw. A little matter, Madame Hélène,' he explained, turning towards his lodger with an apologetic air, 'a little matter relating to an old clerk whom Mr. Aldershaw was compelled to discharge some years ago—before my time, in fact—on account of a tendency he had to drink.'

A slight change came over the face of Madame Hélène.

'An old clerk of Mr. Aldershaw's?' she said, quietly.

'A clerk, Madame Hélène,' said Snowby, with earnestness, 'who might have been a partner in the house; but, owing to his sad propensity, he is now, I have reason to fear, almost destitute. He professes to teach elocution; but all that, I should

imagine, is mere talk. I have been commissioned to look after him, and to prevent him, if possible, from falling into a more helpless condition. He had . . .’

The change in Madame H  l  ne’s face, although a shade more marked, would not have been observed except by such watchful eyes as Kate Snowby’s.

‘Are you ill, Madame H  l  ne?’

The shoulders of Madame H  l  ne appeared to shiver.

‘It is nothing,’ she said, seating herself nearer the fire. ‘I am a little cold, I think : that is all. You were saying, Mr. Snowby . . .?’

‘I was merely going to observe,’ remarked Snowby, still apologetically, ‘that my reason for taking a peculiar interest in this man, is that he had a daughter who was not what a daughter should be. She left her home years ago. Wild-

rake, as he is called, has gone from bad to worse since then. He leads the life of a drunkard; and for this his heartless daughter is, in my opinion, responsible.'

'You are severe, Mr. Snowby,' said Madame Hélène, in a low voice.

'Is it possible,' said Snowby, 'to speak too severely of a woman who has, by her conduct, ruined his prospects in life, and made him a disgrace to society—even dangerous—as Mr. Aldershaw justly remarked.'

'Still, Mr. Snowby,' pleaded Madame Hélène, 'you must admit that what may appear unnatural on the daughter's part is sometimes possible of explanation. The strangest things happen. This woman may not be so heartless, so very wicked, as you suppose. She may have been more sinned against than sinning.'

‘That,’ said Snowby, ‘I cannot deny. For I am as ignorant at present of the details of this affair as you are, Madame Hélène. I am judging of this woman’s conduct from the little I have learnt through Mr. Paul Aldershaw. He has told me simply that she was led astray, and I conclude that this broke her father’s heart. If it is true—and there is, I understand, no reason to doubt it—surely that is enough to justify my condemnation? I question if I could find any term sufficiently severe to express my opinion of a child of mine if she treated me so cruelly. I should curse her! though I own that I might be sorry for it afterwards.’

‘Father!’ said Katie, with her arms thrown suddenly around his neck, ‘why are you so earnest about a trouble that can never come to you? We shall always live

happily together, you know we shall, whether it be in Belgrave Square, as you have fancied, or in this quiet little home. Why, there are tears in your eyes! Do you think it possible I could leave you?’

There were tears in Madame Hélène’s eyes too, as she rose in a restless manner and went over to the piano, and began to touch the chords, as though to conceal what sounded strangely like a sob.



## CHAPTER VII.

## CONSCIENCE STRICKEN.

PUMP COURT, TEMPLE, is one of those sanctuaries within a sanctuary where silence still retains a stronghold, although it is only a few short paces from one of the most deafening thoroughfares in London. All noises belonging to the outer world are excluded from its precincts : or, if they enter there, are solemnly entombed. At one end there is a sombre, covered way which leads into courts not less effectually protected against sounds : at the other, through a narrow opening, there are courts again

where the timid splash of the temple fountain can be heard, hard by. The silence indeed would sometimes seem as though guarded by the disembodied spirits of lawyers who had once resided there: for occasionally people passing in and out of Pump Court appear anxious not to disturb the echoes even of their own footsteps; and as they ascend, or descend, the old wooden staircases, through the arched and open doorways, they converse in confidential voices, as though fearing the representatives of the law who live there still.

The echoes were awakened, one morning, by the light step of a lady who was closely veiled, and who entered Pump Court as if half disposed to hastily retreat again from a place where the silence was so embarrassing. But, after stopping and reflecting for

a moment, she decided to ascend one of the creaking staircases. She knocked at a dark oaken door across which was written :

*Mr. Horace Ludlaw.      Mr. Roy Valroy.*

A thin, tall youth, with a gloomy countenance, answered the summons. He belonged to the common official species: too large for an errand boy, and too small for a clerk. He was, in fact, going through the transformation stage from one to the other.

The lady presented her card and said :

‘I wish to see Mr. Ludlaw.’

The youth opened a door in the passage opposite to the entrance.

‘At present,’ said he, ‘Mr. Ludlaw is engaged. But,’ he added, condescendingly, ‘if you will step in here, we will send in your name.’

The room was small and dull. It looked like a little prison: there was only one tiny window crossed with iron bars, and covered with dust. The furniture consisted of an inky table, a chair, and an old copying press for taking the impressions of legal letters. After offering the chair to the lady the youth retired, closing the door softly.

With the lady's card between his finger and thumb, the youth entered a room at the end of the passage, where he knew that Mr. Ludlaw was deeply engaged in smoking a cigarette in his arm-chair before the fire, enveloped in his loose morning costume, his small body almost lost among soft cushions. On the table at his elbow, amidst a pile of documents, lying loosely together or tied with red tape, was his half finished breakfast. On the floor around his chair were

the morning papers. Documents covered half his desk near one of the windows, and some of the chairs against the walls were heaped up with others. There were documents open on his lap: but he was not reading. His whole attention appeared to be devoted to the cigarette.

The youth took a winding path across the room, and presented the card. Ludlaw read the name with an angry frown:

*Madame Hélène,*

*Rose Villa, The Boulevard,*

*Brixton.*

He continued to look so long and so earnestly at the card that the youth ventured to suggest:

‘The lady is waiting, sir, in the office.’

Ludlaw turned the card about absently and threw it on the table.

‘Grubby,’ said he to the youth, while pouring himself out a cup of coffee, ‘will you oblige me by vanishing?’

Grubby skipped between the documents and disappeared.

Ludlaw drank his coffee and smoked his cigarette with great deliberation, showing no signs of haste or uneasiness in his manner, except an occasional repetition of the frown. When he had finished, and had sat for some minutes with an undecided air, he stood up with his back to the fire, and, with his eyes on the rug, remarked in a low tone, as though he were summing up his thoughts:

‘Now I wonder what this woman wants with me?’

He touched the hand-bell on the table. Grubby entered.

‘Clear away the breakfast, and open the windows for a moment,’ said he; ‘the room is full of tobacco-smoke. Will you be kind enough to look sharp?’

While the boy was obeying these orders briskly, Ludlaw went into an adjoining room to make his toilet. He gave care to every detail in his dress, and then, returning to his seat at the table, began to busy himself with his papers, throwing them, if it were possible, into greater disorder.

After a while he again rang his bell.

‘There is some one waiting to see me, I think you said?’ remarked Ludlaw, absent-mindedly.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the youth—‘a lady.

‘Show the lady in.’

Ludlaw was so absorbed in reading documents when Madame Hélène entered

that he did not immediately look up. She raised her veil and waited patiently.

‘You are still engaged, Mr. Ludlaw?’ said she at last, to attract his attention.

Ludlaw rose slowly from his seat with an air of greater abstraction in his face.

‘Ah!’ said he, ‘my dear Lady . . . I should say Madame H  l  ne,’—he corrected himself with a glance at her card—‘how do you do?’

Madame H  l  ne held out her hand.

‘What a long time—how many years,’ Ludlaw continued, with the hand in his, ‘since I had the pleasure of seeing you?’

‘Many years indeed,’ said Madame H  l  ne.

Ludlaw removed some documents from a chair which he placed for his visitor.

‘Let me see,’ he observed, reseating himself and hunting among his papers



with an increased appearance of preoccupation—‘let me see: you have called, you say, to ask my advice about Sir Michael Valroy?’

‘No, I did not say that.’

Ludlaw looked up with surprise.

‘Did you not?’ said he. ‘How muddled I am this morning! I really must beg your pardon.’

Madame Hélène played nervously with her gloved fingers. Ludlaw watched her under his eyebrows. He seldom looked at anyone straight in the face for more than a second.

‘I have ventured to come and see you,’ said the lady, in a trembling voice, ‘about my father.’

Ludlaw’s face expressed bewilderment.

‘I’m afraid,’ said he, apologetically—  
‘I’m afraid—it’s so many years, you know

—I'm afraid I've forgotten his name.'

'Mr. John Wildrake,' said Madame Hélène.

'To be sure!' said Ludlaw, brightening.  
'How could I have forgotten? But it is so many years ago. Pray tell me, is Mr. Wildrake still living?'

'Yes,' said Madame Hélène, with tears starting into her eyes, 'still living.'

There was a slight pause, during which Ludlaw trifled with a paper-knife upon which he kept his eyes attentively fixed.

'You once showed yourself to be my friend,' said Madame Hélène. 'May I count upon your friendship still?'

'My dear Lady . . . Madame Hélène, I should say . . . can you doubt it?'

Thus encouraged to speak, Madame Hélène hesitated no longer.

'You can do me a service,' she said, 'a

most inestimable service. You can bring about a meeting, perhaps a reconciliation, between my father and me. I have come to ask you, as a great favour, to do this.'

With an air of painful distraction Ludlow got up, and cast his eyes around the room: first upon the documents upon the table, then upon the chairs, then upon the desk, and finally upon those lying in distinct heaps upon the floor.

'One moment,' said he, 'one moment.'

His eye settled upon a pile in a corner near a bookshelf. From beneath he extracted a tin box, and from this box he produced some papers.

'Ah!' said he, selecting a small bundle, bound round with red tape. 'Here we are! "Valroy—Wildrake,"' he continued, reading the superscription, '"correspon-

dence, matrimonial agreement." I took the precaution, as you perceive, to seal this packet.'

He sat down again; and, after having read one or two pages here and there, and made several pencil notes on the margins, he looked up and said :

'The whole affair had escaped my memory! You were saying . . . But stay,' he suddenly added, 'perhaps it will simplify matters if first of all I put one or two questions. Will you permit me?'

Madame Hélène readily assented.

'You were saying that Mr. Wildrake is still alive,' commenced Ludlaw, scrutinizing the legal deed, instead of the face of Madame Hélène. 'Have you seen, or, in fact, held any communication with that gentleman since the date of your marriage with . . .'

‘None whatever, Mr. Ludlaw,’ said Madame H  l  ne. ‘Indeed . . .’

‘Very good. You gave your promise,—did you not—never to hold any communication with Mr. Wildrake, never to mention to him, in fact, that you were married, without the written consent of Sir Michael Valroy?’

‘Yes, I promised,’ said Madame H  l  ne, in a tone of distress. ‘I promised. But . . .’

‘Confine yourself for the moment, if you will be so good,’ said Ludlaw, firmly, though with marked politeness, ‘to answering my questions. You promised, you say, never to hold any communication with Mr. Wildrake, without Sir Michael’s consent. As a matter of form, I must ask you : have you kept that promise?’

‘Yes.’

‘Absolutely?’

‘Yes.’

‘But you wish now to have that promise annulled?’

‘Indeed I do.’

‘You desire, in fact, to gain the permission of Sir Michael Valroy to have an interview or interviews with your father?’

‘Yes; if you think, after all these years,’ said Madame Hélène, ‘that it is necessary to obtain my husband’s consent.’

‘If *I* think it necessary,’ repeated Ludlaw; ‘surely, madame, you would not ask me to be a party to a meeting unless I had the consent of Sir Michael in black and white.’

‘Can it possibly be obtained?’ said Madame Hélène.

Ludlaw tapped his fingers thoughtfully with the paper-knife before replying.

‘I cannot say,’ said he, ‘but I will try what I can do.’

‘Shall you see him soon?’ said Madame Hélène, eagerly; ‘shall I have to wait many days?’

‘Sir Michael Valroy is in England,’ said Ludlaw, ‘as perhaps you are aware . . .’

‘Yes.’

‘I will see to it very soon,’ said Ludlaw, cautiously; ‘and you shall hear from me. But,’ he added, ‘what, may I ask, is your reason for desiring to see Mr. Wildrake after so many years, you know?’

‘Can you not guess, Mr. Ludlaw?’

Ludlaw’s face broke into a provoking smile.

‘Really, madame,’ said he, ‘you must not expect a man in the legal profession

to do that. Answer my question, if you please.'

'I wish to tell him,' said she, 'what he should have been told long ago: that I am the wife of Sir Michael Valroy. I wish to meet my father here, if you will allow me, and explain to him that I was forced by my husband to conceal from him my marriage. I wish to gain, if possible, his forgiveness . . .'

'I understand,' Ludlaw repeated, as though it were a mere business matter. 'His forgiveness.'

'My long absence from England,' continued Madame Hélène, 'and my separation from my husband, is perhaps but a poor excuse for my conduct. But had I thought, had I even dreamed, that what I have done could have caused so much misery, I should have tried long,



long ago to put these family matters right. Is it too late?' she added. 'I sometimes fear, Mr. Ludlaw, that it is. The news that I have gathered about my father makes me shrink with dread from this meeting which must be arranged between us, even if I fail to obtain the consent of Sir Michael Valroy.'

'It can never take place here,' said Ludlaw, firmly, 'without Sir Michael's permission. It is better that you should at once understand that.'

'But,' pleaded Madame H  l  ne, 'my father is leading a most unhappy life—the life of a drunkard! He is living in some poor garret in the City. I dare not go near him there. He would not listen to me. It is only here, in your presence, with all the legal proofs at hand to place before his eyes, that I can ever

hope to convince him that I am married, or hope to find once more a place in his heart.'

Ludlaw lent an attentive ear, though he still kept his eyes fixed upon the paper-knife.

'You hear, then, of Mr. Wildrake,' Ludlaw suggested, 'through some friend, perhaps?'

'My landlord, Mr. Snowby,' Madame Hélène explained, 'is now Mr. Paul Aldershaw's chief clerk.'

'Indeed!' said Ludlaw. 'Then Mr. Wildrake has left the firm, I conclude?'

'Years ago,' said Madame Hélène; 'but Mr. Aldershaw supplies him with money, I believe, indirectly. In fact, it is Mr. Snowby who has been deputed by the merchant to visit my father. I have learnt much through him: and it is almost more

than I can bear. Mr. Snowby little thought, when he spoke the other evening of John Wildrake's sad life, who was listening to the story! If I had the courage to face my father, I would go to that poor garret in the City, and implore him to turn from his evil ways.'

'Without the consent of Sir Michael Valroy?' said Ludlaw. 'Surely not.'

'I sometimes think so,' said Madame Hélène, with an air of desperation. 'I sometimes think my duty lies there, at my father's side. Indeed, can there be any doubt that it is so?'

'Yes,' said Ludlaw. 'You must not give way to impulse. It is your duty, now, to wait.'

He placed the deed and the bundle of letters, as he spoke, in their former order, tying them again with the red tape. He

now laid them beside him on the table.

‘I will be guided by your advice,’ said Madame Hélène, with a sigh, as she rose and held out her hand. ‘Yes, I am impulsive, Mr. Ludlaw, I know. But I am sure, under the circumstances, that you will not criticise my conduct too severely.’

After this interview with Ludlaw, it seemed to Madame Hélène as though the deep trouble which had for many years weighed upon her conscience was beginning to grow lighter. A sense of hope, even of happiness, already opened out before her at the prospect of seeing her father, and bestowing upon him a care and affection which she had so long and so undutifully withheld. Bound by an agreement, as sacred as an oath, to keep her marriage with Sir Michael Valroy a

secret, she was too proud, or perhaps too broken in spirit, through grief and disappointment, when a separation from her husband took place, to demand a release from her promise. Under the pseudonym of 'Madame Hélène,' she had commenced her career as a singer. Her success had proved greater than she had anticipated. She became a favourite with the public: her beauty pleased as much as her voice. This sudden and complete change in her life had had the effect, as frequently happens, of altering her character. The past, when recurring to her mind, presented such a dismal picture that she had not the fortitude to face that portion of it which it was still possible to rectify.

For ten years and more she had left undone that which she was trying her best to do now. Her inclination had been

often strong, but at the eleventh hour her courage had always failed her. Instead of completing her good intention while the impulse lasted, she found in her art a pretext for procrastination; and her good purpose, gradually growing weak, was abandoned, and then forgotten in the midst of her brilliant achievements before the footlights.

Until she found her home with the Snowbys, Madame Hélène was even ignorant that her father was no longer a clerk in the great house of Aldershaw, Grimwade, and Company. That he was leading a miserable life, as Snowby had described it in her presence, was now first made known to her as something almost impossible to realise. She had purposely taken up her residence with the manager, hoping to gain news of her parent. It had come

with a swiftness she had not anticipated. But instead of learning, as she expected to do, that he was a partner in the firm, she was told that he was destitute, living in a wretched garret in some crowded part of the old city! The discovery had stricken her with remorse. Her resolution was taken, and her interview with Ludlaw had been the result.

It was with feverish impatience that she awaited the decision which must come from Sir Michael Valroy before she could move another step: to gain recognition and forgiveness from her father was now her one thought. The days passed slowly: they seemed longer than those unheeded years which had gone since she had fled from home.

She was beset with many fears. Would her husband bind her to the promise to

keep their unhappy union a secret? She could not conceal from herself the disquietude which a refusal would awaken in her heart; to restrain the impulse which bid her rebel against Sir Michael Valroy, should he design to hold her to that promise still, seemed contrary to the promptings of her woman's nature.

But for the consolation which her young companion, Kate Snowby, unconsciously bestowed by her cheerful presence in her apartments, it is doubtful if Madame H  l  ne could have quietly endured the painful situation a single day. She recognised qualities in the character of the girl which gave her courage; while talking with her, or teaching her, she was herself learning a lesson which enabled her to bear her distress with more submission.

Watching Katie late one afternoon, as



she stood looking out of the window upon the leafless 'boulevard,' Madame H  l  ne called her presently to her side by the fire.

'Is it not early,' said she, 'to be expecting your father's return?'

'I think not,' Katie answered, glancing at the clock, 'if it was his intention to come straight home from the City. But I was wondering whether it was not just possible that he had gone to-night to visit that poor old clerk.'

Madame H  l  ne suppressed a sigh while asking, in a low voice :

'Did he say that he should go there this evening?'

'No,' said Katie. 'But he told me he should go some evening soon.'

For a little while Madame H  l  ne was silent. Then she looked up and said,

‘Katie, you have a very kind father.’

With the brightest smile upon her face Katie replied :

‘He is the best and dearest in the world.’

‘Ah!’ said Madame Hélène, meditatively, ‘what will he do without you?’

‘Without me?’ repeated Katie, with surprise, ‘I never intend to leave him. We made up our minds, I think it must have been when I was a baby, when my mother died, that we would always live together.’

‘My dear child,’ said her friend, with earnestness, ‘such a resolution might be weakened to-morrow by the presence in your tender young heart of a deeper affection than the love you bear towards your father.’

Katie looked almost sad.

‘I know what you mean,’ said she.

‘Then is it wise,’ said Madame H  l  ne, ‘to indulge in ideas which some day may bring needless pain? Perhaps you have already had some cause to suffer in your heart . . .’

‘No, indeed,’ said Katie, ‘my deepest love has always been, and still is, for my father. I know no other love; I do not wish to know another.’

Madame H  l  ne bent her head and clasped her hands as though she were suffering pain at Katie’s words.

‘So I thought and felt, my child, not many years ago.’

For a moment Kate was silent, but her thoughtfulness increased.

‘The only thing that sometimes troubles me,’ the girl presently confessed, ‘is that father will not be content, when Mr.

Grimwade's room is dusted, and he becomes a partner in the firm, to remain in this neighbourhood, where we are so quiet and so happy, but will move into the West-end, where, as he seriously believes, my future husband is waiting for me among the upper ranks of society. I hardly know,' she added, with a smile, 'whether to laugh or whether to cry when I think about it, as I often do; for to marry anyone above me in station could, I am quite sure, only lead to unhappiness.'

'No one,' said Madame Hélène, 'knows that better than I do.'

'For this reason,' continued Kate, 'I prefer to be always what I am now: his little housekeeper. If I married some one in high life, I should not please myself; and, if I married some one in my own position, I should not, I fear, please

my father. This is all that I meant, dear madame, when I said that it was my wish and my intention never to leave him.'

Madame H  l  ne looked approvingly into the girl's face.

'Your good sense, Katie,' said she, 'will always guide you rightly. Though most women with your beauty would show signs of restlessness and discontent : would, indeed, expect to be admired, petted, and spoilt. If such women are sometimes happier than you are, they sometimes suffer more ; far more, my child, than will ever, I hope, fall to your lot in life to suffer. They find out when too late, let us suppose, that they have married a man above them in station, with ideas of domestic life utterly different to their own. Perhaps,' added Madame H  l  ne, in a low voice, 'perhaps a separa-

tion, or something even worse, is the result. Perhaps the marriage, in some instance, has been so contrary to the wishes of her friends that the woman has chosen her husband without the consent, even without the knowledge, of her parents. Thus, at a moment's notice, she may be thrown upon the world with nothing but her own abilities to aid her in facing it.'

'That is a sad picture,' said Katie, in a low voice.

'But that, my child,' Madame Hélène pursued, 'is not always all. Even if the wife, separated from her husband and her friends, is fortunate enough to support herself, or even grow rich, the time may come when she longs to see her parents again: a father, like your own, dear Katie, after years have passed, may still be living.'

‘It is never, I hope, too late,’ said Katie, ‘to go and receive his forgiveness?’

‘No, no,’ was the reply, ‘never too late, I sincerely hope and pray.’

The evening had grown dusk while they were talking, and the room was so dark now that Katie could only see the face of Madame H  l  ne by the light of the fire. It wore a look which made her heart beat faster: a look that half revealed a secret which the young girl shrank from surmising when she thought that she would perhaps soon be forced to share it with her friend.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ELOCUTION.

ONE dark evening, Snowby found himself standing on the steps of the old mansion in Gable Court, where John Wildrake lived. A sense of strange curiosity, not unmixed with alarm at the gloomy aspect of the place, and of the river beyond, took possession of Mr. Aldershaw's trusty manager. He paused for a moment with a certain degree of indecision.

For it was not altogether his uneasiness, when he glanced at the entrance, which caused him hesitation before demanding



admittance. The number of bell-handles on both sides of the door, ranged beneath each other like stops in an organ, puzzled him greatly. Under one bell-handle he read, on a small brass-plate, the word 'Engraver,' under another, 'Printer,' under another, 'Midwife'; but none of them, out of a dozen or more, suggested John Wildrake, nor even elocution. Noticing at last one handle which had no professional plate beneath it, Snowby took courage, gave a sharp pull, and waited the result with impatience.

After an interval of some minutes, he heard footsteps approaching: the door was slowly opened, and before him there stood an old man, in a skull-cap, with a long white beard.

'Does Mr. Wildrake live here?'

Without replying to this question, Mr.

Isaacs, the landlord (for it was Nedlicott's friend, the Jew), held the door open still wider, and, with a slight wave of the hand, invited Snowby to enter.

The hall into which the manager obediently stepped bore a striking resemblance to the chancel of an old church or chapel. It was paved with stone, worn in many parts, like the steps outside. The panelled walls, sombre in colour through age, were hung with tablets. These tablets were cased in quaint, ornamental frames filled with scriptural passages. Two large frames, extending from the ceiling almost to the floor, held, in letters of gold, the ten commandments. They stood out in bold relief against the dark background. The only light was an oil-lamp placed in a corner at the foot of the broad open staircase.

‘May I inquire, sir,’ said the old man, ‘whether you are a friend of Mr. Wildrake’s?’

‘Yes,’ said Snowby, after a moment’s reflection—‘a friend.’

‘In that case,’ replied the Jew, ‘you will find his door facing you at the top of the third staircase. But if you are not a friend, sir, if you are one of Mr. Wildrake’s creditors, and think that there is any chance of getting your money, let me advise you not to waste your time by going up. I doubt if he has sixpence in the world.’

‘Indeed!’

The old man shook his head slowly and sorrowfully.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I doubt it very much. My name,’ he went on to explain, ‘is Benjamin Isaacs, and I am Mr. Wildrake’s

landlord; and, to be perfectly candid with you, I doubt if he has even a penny.'

'That's not very satisfactory,' said Snowby. 'Do you think so?'

'*I* do not think so,' said the old man, with decision.

'It does not look, for example,' said Snowby, 'as if elocution was a very paying profession.'

'Elocution?' said the old man, scornfully. 'Mr. Wildrake is mad.'

With some anger in his voice, but with the visionary look in his eyes, he continued:

'Elocution! I wonder what next? He has always some scheme in his head for improving the condition of the rising generation, as he calls it. If he invented some scheme for improving his own condition, and left the rising generation alone,

which is quite capable of taking care of itself, he would soon be a more prosperous man. If you are his friend,' added he, 'tell him so to his face, as I have told him over and over again.'

He took the quaint silver snuff-box from a deep waistcoat pocket, and then resumed.

'You may think,' said he, tapping the box meditatively—'you may think, sir, that all this is no business of mine; that if Mr. Wildrake chooses to waste his time in what I consider senseless schemes, he has a right to do so. But I take an interest in my lodgers; I call them my children.'

He paused to take a pinch of snuff with a self-satisfied, patriarchal air, and then turned his gaze towards the tablets on the walls.

‘This is our trade,’ he pursued, in a lower tone, and with a wave of the hand towards the frames containing the ten commandments; ‘we decorate the holy places, and we reserve the ground-floor here for our workshops and our dwelling. The rest we let out unfurnished. The house is always full. My children are very good children, as a rule. The third floor front is the only bad one in the house at present; the only really bad one. But he is very bad indeed, sir, very bad indeed,’ repeated the old man, in a trembling voice, as he slowly walked towards a door behind the wall leading to a small yard where there was a shed crowded with working materials—‘very bad indeed. You will find his door facing you, if you will walk upstairs. The third floor front, sir—the third floor front.’

While uttering these words the old Jew disappeared.

With his curiosity by no means diminished, Snowby mounted the dark staircase.

He knocked softly at the door indicated—no answer. He knocked again somewhat louder: still no answer. So he ventured to turn the handle.

The room, on first entering, appeared to Snowby to be empty. It was large, and had three windows, the blinds of which were drawn down. A guttering candle stood upon a low chest of drawers, near the door. The furniture was very scanty: a small table under the window, a couple of chairs, and a wooden bed in a shady corner near the fire-place. Upon this bed Snowby perceived, as he stepped towards it, a man lying full length, wrapped in a

long, grey dressing-gown, with his face towards the wall.

Snowby stood, somewhat embarrassed, in the centre of the room, coughed, and then uttered Wildrake's name.

The man moved himself upon his elbow, with his head in a listening attitude, and his face still to the wall.

'Hush!' he whispered, 'whose footsteps are those? Don't you hear them? *I* hear them, all day and all night long. But I never see her; I never see her face.'

Snowby took a step nearer to the bed.

'Mr. Wildrake,' said he, 'I have called to pay you a visit. My name is Snowby.'

'Snowby?' repeated Wildrake, turning his face towards his visitor, and shading his eyes with his hand. 'Snowby? I've a bad memory for names unless they are creditors. What I mean is . . .'



‘I’m Mr. Paul Aldershaw’s manager,’ explained Mr. Snowby. ‘You may recollect that, when you were last at the office, we arranged a small transaction together in Mr. Grimwade’s room.’

John Wildrake looked searchingly into Snowby’s face. He then rose from the bed, thrust his hands deeply into the pockets of his dressing-gown, and began to walk up and down the room, hugging himself, and with his head bent thoughtfully to the ground. Presently he stopped and said, with a motion of the shoulder,

‘Sit down.’

At the same time he seated himself opposite to Snowby, at the edge of his bed.

‘I have had it on my mind,’ said he, ‘for some days past, to settle that little affair, I have indeed. But I have had so

many engagements, and I have had so many expenses since I announced my intention of giving lessons in elocution, that I have found it next to impossible to give that bill a thought. If my memory does not mislead me,' he added, 'it was a draft at one month's sight for ten pounds, ten shillings, and no pence?'

'Precisely,' said Snowby, taking out a pocket-book, 'precisely.'

'Ah!' said Wildrake, 'I see you have the draft with you. That's business. Would you allow me to glance over it?'

Snowby handed the document to Wildrake, who looked at it for a moment in silence.

'I perceive,' said he, raising his eyes, 'I perceive that it is already due.'

'Yes,' said Snowby, 'it is due to-day.'

'And you have been put to the trouble,'

said Wildrake, with some concern, 'you have been put to the inconvenience of calling for payment.'

Snowby smiled complacently.

'I have been put to no inconvenience,' said he. 'In fact, as a former clerk in the house of Aldershaw, Grimwade and Company, you are aware that we are always in the habit, like other houses, of presenting our drafts when they fall due. It is a mere matter of business. It is not a question of convenience. The question is, can you meet the bill to-day?'

'To tell you the truth,' said Wildrake, 'I cannot.'

'Then,' said Snowby, 'perhaps you will consent to leave the matter in my hands. In a word,' added he, 'if you will agree to endorse the bill over to me, Mr. Wildrake, I will undertake to meet it for you.'

John Wildrake looked at Snowby with surprise. Then rising from his seat upon the edge of the bed he went over to his visitor and gave him his hand.

‘I should be very much obliged to you,’ said he, ‘very much obliged if you would. But,’ he added, with his eye again on the paper, ‘but let us clearly understand each other. I shall be, it would appear, no longer in debt to the house in the old square. I shall be in debt to you and for the same amount, neither more nor less, namely : ten pounds, ten shillings, and no pence?’

‘That,’ said Snowby, ‘is precisely the situation.’

‘Ah!’

John Wildrake again glanced at Snowby and again at the paper. Then, thrusting his hands once more into his pockets, he gave himself another hug, and began to

walk up and down the large carpetless room, deep in thought.

‘Now, I am wondering,’ said he, after a long pause, ‘whether I understand you rightly. I am wondering whether you, as one of the rising generation, take any interest in elocution; whether you recognise its importance in the nineteenth century. If you do, sir, I need scarcely remind you that the man who is master of the art of speaking, in public or in private, holds the secret of success in life; that to be able to express oneself with aptitude fluency, and precision, is to be able to triumph over the human race.’

‘He walked to the end of the chamber and back to where Snowby was seated, and then continued :

‘Now, let us choose a profession,’ said he. ‘Let us take any calling in life you

like. Let us take the law. A man is accused wrongfully of crime. He looks out for a lawyer who has mastered the art of elocution. If he does not find one possessing aptitude, fluency, and precision, what happens? He is hanged !

Wildrake again paused and looked at the manager as though to study the effect of his words. Then with a wave of his hand he continued :

‘Or,’ said he, ‘let us take commerce. A manufacturer wishes to introduce a new article to the trade. It is the very commodity, let us suppose, that the public is waiting for. It combines the minimum of price with the maximum of durability. But the manufacturer knows nothing of elocution ; he cannot speak with aptitude, fluency, and precision. He has not a spark of eloquence. What is the result?

The article is a drug in the market!’

Pausing once more with his eyes fixed on Snowby’s face, Wildrake then concluded.

‘Now, what I propose,’ said he, ‘is this. I owe you ten pounds. Shall I pay you this amount at my earliest convenience? or,’ he added, as though he had received a sudden inspiration, ‘will you take some lessons in elocution and allow me in that way to balance our account?’

‘Some lessons in elocution,’ said Snowby, with promptness, ‘would cancel the debt.’

‘Ah! Then we’ll commence at once,’ said Wildrake, with energy. ‘But, first of all’—and he looked down into a large pewter pot on the mantel-shelf—‘what can I offer you?’

The manager expressed his thanks, but

declared that he did not feel thirsty.

‘The bitter beer over the road, in Thames Street,’ said Wildrake, jerking his thumb towards the windows, ‘is not bad. The brandy is excellent. You had better take something.’

Snowby, thus appealed to, said,

‘Well, then, a glass of bitter.’

‘Good!’ said Wildrake; and he immediately plunged his hands into his pockets. But, apparently failing to discover that of which he was in search, he went over to a coat which hung behind the door, like a scare-crow, under his hat.

He examined the pockets with a result equally unsatisfactory. At this moment, the candle on the chest of drawers spluttered and went out.

‘Good!’ he repeated, with cheerfulness. ‘I’ll strike a light.’



Wildrake began to grope about the room. Presently he came across a box of matches, and a flat, tin candlestick. As soon as the lucifer was applied, the candle guttered down one side, as the other had done. Wildrake, with this gloomy light in his hand, walked towards the door. After standing pensively for some moments, he turned suddenly towards Snowby, and said briskly :

‘You haven’t half-a-crown, have you, which you could lend me ?’

Snowby took the coin from his purse, and handed it to Wildrake.

‘Good !’ said he, ‘very good.’

He then went out into the passage, and called up the staircase persuasively :

‘Mimosa ?’

Not a sound.

‘Are you there,’ repeated Wildrake, still

more persuasively, 'Mimosa! Are you there?'

As Wildrake repeated the name the third time, a scuffling was heard on the landing above, and something seemed to fall down a flight of stairs and arrive, somewhat out of breath, at Wildrake's door.

'Come in, Mimosa! Have you hurt yourself?'

Something came into the room sideways—something which might have been an old woman or a young girl. The individual was short and thin, and somewhat bent in the shoulders. Her dress was a loose, cotton gown; and her hair, which was in a very dishevelled condition, was twisted up in a loose knot behind. She had sleepy eyes, and a pale, thin face, relieved by patches of black. Altogether, she

looked as though she had been awakened out of a sound nap on a bed of coals.

‘Have you hurt yourself?’

‘Lor ! no, sir. I ain’t hurt myself.’

Her expression was vacant. She had entered the room with her mouth open, and she kept it open, to let out the words, without moving her lips. The sound came from somewhere within, as it might have come from the mouth of a telephone.

‘That girl, sir, falls up and downstairs at all hours of the day. She never hurts herself,’ said Wildrake, pointing her out to Snowby as though she were some remarkable automaton. ‘Did you ever hurt yourself in your life, Mimosa?’

‘Lor ! no, sir ; not me.’

‘I want you to run an errand. Take these,’ said Wildrake, handing the girl the half-crown, the pewter pot, and the black

bottle. 'Take these, and get me a pint of bitter, six of brandy, a screw of tobacco, and two clay pipes.'

She disappeared almost before he had ceased speaking, as though she knew the message already by heart. The next moment, a noise, which sounded like an exciting race between 'Mimosa,' the pewter pot, and the black bottle, was heard down the staircase, step by step, in quick succession, until the front-door was shut with a slam.

John Wildrake now divested himself of his dressing-gown, and put on the black coat, the only other article of wearing apparel, except the hat, to be seen in the room. He now began to assume all the airs of a host. From a cupboard in the panelled wall he brought forth two tumblers and placed them on the table with as

much ceremony as if he were preparing a banquet. He filled a water-jug with water from a tap on the staircase, and set that on the table also, regarding it sideways with an ironical smile. He had just completed these preliminaries when the unmistakable sound of Mimosa, the pewter pot, and the black bottle, falling rapidly upstairs was heard. Thereupon Wildrake immediately hastened out, candle in hand, to meet them, with an expression of some anxiety.

‘Now, the first lesson I shall give you in elocution,’ said John Wildrake, pouring out a glass of ale for Snowby with a sparkling head of froth at the finish, ‘will be at the Loafers’ Hall, in Fleet Street. Have you ever been there?’

Snowby said he had never even heard of the Loafers’ Hall.

‘Ah!’ said Wildrake, in a regretful tone, ‘the rising generation has much to learn.’

Snowby could not deny that there was considerable truth in Mr. Wildrake’s remark.

‘The “Loafers’ Hall,”’ Wildrake explained, while assisting himself to brandy out of the black bottle, and sprinkling it cautiously with drops of water, ‘the Loafers’ Hall is a hall for discussion, and the men who speak there are men of intellect and learning. They are men who are thorough masters of elocution. You will gain more knowledge of the art of speaking, in public or private, with aptitude, fluency, and precision, by spending one evening with me there than I could possibly teach you in a month in my own apartments.’

‘How often,’ said Snowby, ‘do you discuss?’

‘Three times a week,’ said Wildrake, lighting his clay pipe at the candle. ‘There is a discussion to-night. The subject is “Capital Punishment.”’

Snowby expressed, as his opinion, that the question was one which could not be discussed too often.

‘Then come,’ said Wildrake, ‘and take your first lesson to-night. I will introduce you to men with such intellects as you don’t meet with every day. Their language, during the debates, may sometimes not be what one might call parliamentary; but you will soon discover that there is more than one genuine Cicero among them. Their eloquence is, at times, most extraordinary.’

Snowby declared himself interested.

‘But,’ he added, ‘I am so much engaged. I see so little of “life.” My duties in the City keep me there all day: and in the evening I generally remain at home with my daughter, who . . .’

Wildrake looked up quickly into Snowby’s face. ‘You have a daughter,’ said he, in a low voice.

‘Yes. But she has at last found a suitable companion,’ said Snowby. ‘This is a great relief to me. I can now see something, perhaps, of the world. Until our lodger, Madame Hélène, came to live with us, I seldom stirred from home in the evening without my Kate. I never had the heart to leave her alone. Some men would. I never could, never!’

‘So,’ said Wildrake, watching a cloud of tobacco from his pipe,—‘so you have a daughter.’



‘Yes ; “one fair daughter,”’ said Snowby, with a smile.

While Snowby was speaking, the expression on Wildrake’s face was undergoing a marked change : and he began to pass his long fingers over his features nervously, and to look around the room with his head on one side as though some sound had reached his ears which troubled him. He leaned towards Snowby after a short pause, and, touching his arm with the end of his clay pipe, said, with a look of suppressed fierceness in his eyes,

‘*I had a daughter once.*’

‘Indeed ?’

‘Hush !’ said Wildrake. ‘Listen.’

He rose from his seat and walked softly towards the door.

‘Listen !’ he repeated. ‘Do you hear footsteps outside ?’

‘On the staircase?’

‘Yes.’

‘No,’ said Snowby, ‘not a sound.’

‘I hear them,’ said Wildrake. ‘They’re my daughter’s footsteps. I hear them all day—all night long. But I never see her face now—I never see her face.’

He began to pace up and down the room slowly like a hunted animal, stopping to listen at every turn, and passing his hands nervously over his face.

‘When I lie down at night, I hear her footsteps most distinctly. The sound is always there,’ said he, touching his ears. ‘It haunts me; I cannot sleep. I know how it will end,’ he added, leaning his elbows on the mantelshelf and burying his face in his hands. ‘I know how it will end, unless I can get rest. I know how it will end.’

Snowby, thinking to rouse him from these melancholy thoughts, got up from his chair, and said, in a cheerful tone :

‘ Come, Mr. Wildrake, we were talking of visiting the Loafers’ Hall to-night. Is it not time to go ?’

Wildrake started: he recovered his former manner at the mention of Loafers’ Hall as though by magic.

‘ Ah,’ said he, buttoning his coat tightly to his neck, ‘ to be sure ! the lesson in elocution. What time is it ? It must be getting late.’

He emptied out into his glass what remained of the brandy, and drank it off.

‘ Half-past eight,’ said Snowby, referring to his watch.

Wildrake put on his hat and said :

‘ Then let us start at once. The debate begins at nine.’

He took up the candle, and opened the door to lead the way. Lifting his long, trembling fingers above the flame, Wildrake threw a shadow on the wall as they descended the staircase—a shadow which reminded Snowby of a thing like a large spider crawling after them.

## CHAPTER IX.

## DEBATING.

THE clock over the small platform or rostrum in the Loafers' discussion hall was striking nine when John Wildrake seated himself at a table as the chairman-elect. The room was not crowded. About a dozen men who supported the 'chair' sat at the centre table placed in front of this elevated spot, and a few scattered individuals, who looked as if they had opinions exclusively their own, which they had no intention of expressing, occupied tables near the walls.

Snowby retired to a place among these neutral 'loafers.' In shape the hall resembled a saloon on board ship. There were no windows, the ceiling being covered with a skylight. The floor was freshly sanded, and the furniture was of dark-coloured mahogany, presenting a very tempting picture of old-fashioned coziness.

Wildrake opened the discussion on capital punishment, appealing strongly for reformation. He was listened to with attention. His earnestness was imposing, and his strange manner, and still stranger mode of expressing himself, awakened an interest in him as well as in the subject. With his face flushed with drink, his watery eyes flashing with indignation, his trembling hand outstretched, and his long forefinger fre-

quently pointed as though at some phantom which rose up before him in the hall, he demanded of the gentlemen there assembled whether any of them had domestic hearths, and, if so, whether they had wives or daughters. This was the most impressive part of his oration.

‘These are sacred charges ! We guard them with our last drop of blood,’ said he, in a deep, fierce tone ; ‘and the villain,’ he added, stabbing with his finger at the phantom, ‘the villain who steals into our homes and robs us of one of these should be treated like a dog. Would you, then, hang the man who takes the law into his own hands and slays this hound ? would you hang him ?’

For an hour or more Wildrake continued illustrating his words with examples, pointing at his phantom as the cause of every

crime. Everyone appeared satisfied with the entertainment: the room was soon enveloped in clouds of tobacco smoke from the long clay pipes; and the waiter never ceased to pass in and out from the bar conveying refreshments to the customers; and sometimes, getting in the way of Wildrake's pointed finger, he created a burst of merriment. But at last, when Wildrake showed no signs of bringing his speech to a conclusion, a gentleman with a fiery face and red whiskers began to grow impatient, and rose from his seat, uttering protests against the 'chair.' Each time he got upon his legs, there was an uproar. In the midst of one of these interruptions, Wildrake, who had been kept well supplied by the waiter with glasses of 'brandy hot,' sat down, and resting his head on his arm went off into a sort of lethargy. The



gentleman with the fiery face and red whiskers profiting by this incident jumped up and continued on his legs until he succeeded in gaining a hearing. He principally addressed abusive remarks towards the 'chair,' who replied by breathing heavily, as though he were being suffocated. At length Wildrake, like a man attempting to exhibit in his own person a scene on the scaffold, began to lean over the edge of his high table as though he were being hanged; and finally he dropped to the ground as if he had been cut down by the executioner.

The 'chair' being now vacated, and moreover it being nearly midnight, an adjournment of this debate on capital punishment was proposed, seconded, and carried unanimously.

The Loafers began to disperse: but a few

lingered on their way out of the tavern to have a parting glass at the bar. Meanwhile Snowby had assisted the eccentric chairman to rise from his undignified position.

‘What I want,’ said Wildrake, in a dissatisfied tone, looking wearily round, ‘what I want is sleep. I want rest.’

He took a step, as he spoke, towards an old-fashioned arm-chair which stood temptingly near, sat down, and closed his eyes.

Snowby regarded him with perplexity. Under any circumstances he would not have left Wildrake to find his way home in his present condition without some compunction. But, having undertaken to keep the old clerk out of mischief, it was clearly his duty, he considered, to see Wildrake safely lodged inside that old

mansion in Gable Court. He began to think, too, of Katie, and the anxiety his absence might cause her. He had not anticipated remaining so late with Wildrake.

In the midst of these embarrassing reflections the door leading from the bar was opened. Nedlicott, Mr. Cheadle's secretary, stepped into the room.

He raised his hat in his brisk manner on perceiving a stranger, and, looking from Wildrake to Snowby, he said, in a polite tone :

‘The “chair” has been making merry this evening, it would seem, sir?’

‘Yes. Rather too merry,’ answered Snowby, smiling sadly.

Nedlicott placed his hand gently upon Wildrake's shoulder.

‘Do you happen,’ said he, looking with

curiosity into Snowby's face, 'do you happen to know anything about this gentleman?'

'Yes.'

Nedlicott again looked at Snowby, and with deeper curiosity this time.

'May I ask,' said he, 'whether he has found a friend?'

'I hope so,' was Snowby's cautious reply.

'Ah,' said Nedlicott, stroking his chin, 'that's good news. Though I fear that friendship comes too late to be of benefit. He's drifting.'

Wildrake moved in his chair without raising his head.

'What I want,' he muttered, in a thick voice, 'what I want is rest.'

'He's drifting fast,' Nedlicott continued; 'and, when a man like this begins to

drift, you may keep him afloat, but you can't turn him back on his course. He will go on drifting; nothing will prevent it.'

'Rest,' said Wildrake, passing his fingers over his face in his nervous manner. 'I want rest!'

'I've seen a good deal of this sort of thing,' Nedlicott declared, with another glance at Wildrake, and a jerk of his head at the world in general. 'They often drift more quickly. We keep them afloat; that's all. They go on drifting.'

'Rest,' repeated Wildrake.

'Now, this man,' Nedlicott went on, 'this man has had a trouble, and it often affects him here;' and Nedlicott touched his forehead with his finger; 'and often after these debates he is somewhat troublesome to get home.'

‘But,’ said Snowby, with some impatience, ‘he must be got there somehow. What would you suggest? A cab? The fact is,’ added he, consulting his watch with an anxious face, ‘the fact is, I am pressed for time.’

‘In that case, said Nedlicott, ‘leave him to me.’

‘You’re very good,’ said Snowby. ‘Indeed, you would be doing me a great favour if you would undertake to see him on his way. His address . . .’

‘Gable Court, Thames Street,’ said Nedlicott, with a smile. ‘This is not the first time that I have accompanied Mr. Wildrake to his lodgings: not the first time by any means. We are old friends,’ added he, again placing his hand on Wildrake’s shoulder; ‘friends of some years’ standing, eh, old man?’

Snowby began to button up his coat as he moved towards the door.

‘Then, I will wish you good-evening, sir,’ said he, raising his hat to Nedlicott; ‘and,’ he added, ‘many thanks for taking this responsibility off my shoulders to-night.’

‘Don’t mention it,’ said Nedlicott; ‘I generally look in here on debating nights, after we have finished at our theatre—the “Frivolity,” you know—and if Wildrake needs an arm I give it him. Perhaps,’ he continued, walking with Snowby towards the door of the tavern, ‘perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing you here again some night?’

‘I should not be surprised,’ said Snowby; ‘indeed, I think it is very probable.’

Nedlicott took out a pocket-book, and said:

‘Will you accept my card? The fact is,’ he added, half apologetically, ‘you are the first who, to my knowledge, has shown the slightest interest in this unfortunate man. I should really like to meet you again. That is my name.’

Snowby took the card: upon it was written :

*Mr. Edward Nedlicott. Fresco Club.*

‘Next Saturday,’ said Nedlicott, ‘is a musical night at the “Fresco.” I shall be there at eleven p.m. Perhaps you could find time to drop in. The music is not bad; mostly professional.’

Snowby said he should be delighted. Next Saturday, he declared, would suit him admirably.

‘Besides,’ he added, ‘music is my hobby.’



‘Then,’ said Nedlicott, with cordiality, ‘I shall expect you. Good-night.’

When Nedlicott returned to the discussion hall, Wildrake was seated in the same attitude. He was breathing in a sonorous tone. His hat had fallen forward, almost hiding his face, and his hands hung helplessly over the arms of the chair.

‘Come,’ said Nedlicott, bending down, and touching him gently. ‘Come, Wildrake! It is time to start. You will not find her by sitting here. Come,’ he repeated, closer to his ear. ‘Come and look for her—*your daughter*.’

Nedlicott’s last words had a strange effect. Wildrake started, clenched his fists, opened his eyes, and stared about him. Then he looked up into his friend’s face.

‘Ned,’ said he, clutching Nedlicott’s arm. ‘Ned, I heard her footsteps to-night; I heard them more distinctly than I have heard them for many a day.’

‘Come then,’ said Nedlicott; ‘come at once.’

Wildrake rose from his seat, and, fumbling with the buttons of his coat in his nervous manner, said:

‘I’m ready, Ned, I’m ready.’

He put his hat straight, steadied himself, and walked out into the bar, followed by Nedlicott, with a gleam of purpose in his eyes.

There were still a few ‘loafers’ standing round the counter talking with the landlord, a stout man, with a round face, closely shaved, and small, twinkling eyes.

‘Mr. Wildrake,’ said the tavern-keeper,

turning to the chairman, 'give it a name, sir. What shall it be? Brandy?'

'Brandy,' said Wildrake, looking round his collar towards Nedlicott anxiously. 'Brandy hot.'

'Mr. Nedlicott,' continued the landlord, 'you'll join us in a glass, sir, before you go?'

Then he added, looking round upon his customers :

'Eh, gentlemen? Let us drink Mr. Wildrake's health!'

Everyone echoed the landlord's sentiments, in which Nedlicott joined, although he looked serious and stroked his chin.

'What I want,' said Wildrake, responding to the toast by leaning against the bar, and grasping his tumbler, with his inanimate condition creeping over him again. 'What I want is sleep.'

‘Not you!’ said the gentleman with the fiery face and the red whiskers, who was among the loitering ‘loafers’ at the bar. ‘Not you! It is a fact recognised by the medical profession that we sleep too much.’

‘I know,’ said Wildrake, eyeing the leader of the opposition with anger. ‘I know, sir, what I’m talking about.’

The waiter here began to move about in a confidential manner.

‘Time, gentlemen,’ said he, looking at the clock. ‘If you please, gentlemen, time!’

‘Your speech to-night,’ said the opposition, frowning at this interruption, ‘was eloquent. But that you know what you are talking about is a question which we will discuss when we resume the debate on capital punishment.’

‘We will!’ said Wildrake, emptying his glass of brandy at a gulp. ‘We will! As, in fact,’ he added, ‘I have expressed to-night my opinion. I will repeat, sir, that there are some men—I say some—who ought to be hanged.’

‘Ah,’ said the leader of the opposition, in an insinuating tone.

The waiter here began to lower the gas.

‘If you please, gentlemen,’ said he, persuasively; ‘if you please.’

‘But there are other men,’ continued Wildrake, ‘there are other men to whom the law should show mercy. For how,’ he added, looking around him and striking his fist upon the counter until the glasses rattled again, ‘how can we always govern our passions!’

‘True,’ said the opposition leader, ‘very

true! We sleep too much: we eat too much. I may say, indeed, we drink too much. Quite right, Mr. Wildrake, quite right!’

‘Drink?’ said Wildrake, again striking the counter with his fist. ‘I hate it. I want sleep. What I want is rest.’

He leaned forward against the counter, and his head fell heavily upon his arm.

‘Time, gentlemen,’ the waiter repeated, holding the principal tavern door temptingly open, ‘if you please.’

‘Come, Wildrake,’ said Nedlicott, touching the drunkard’s arm, ‘come along.’

‘I’m ready, Ned,’ answered Wildrake, rousing himself. ‘I’m ready.’

The waiter now began to manœuvre as if the customers were a flock of sheep. He endeavoured to induce one to pass out at the door as though satisfied that the rest

would follow. After several attempts his method succeeded, and the 'loafers' went laughing and talking into the street, where Nedlicott bid them good-night, and, taking Wildrake's arm, led him through dark by-ways and alleys towards Gable Court.

John Wildrake impeded progress at every turning. Sometimes he leaned against a post at the corner of a street; sometimes sat down upon a doorstep, refusing to stir. But they reached the court at last; when the noise of the traffic had ceased, and the chimes of the old church clocks sounded like the voice of the great metropolis murmuring in its sleep. Wildrake tottered against the railings in front of the old house and reposed his head upon the spikes, as he had often done before.

‘I want rest,’ he repeated, turning over uncomfortably on these broken spikes; ‘what I want is rest.’

‘Then, why don’t you go to bed?’ said Nedlicott, impatiently.

‘Bed?’ said Wildrake, with contempt. ‘I get no rest there. Footsteps,’ he groaned, ‘footsteps all night long.’

‘Give me your latch-key.’

Wildrake slowly obeyed, and then sat down upon the doorstep with his head between his hands.

Nedlicott opened the door, and, bidding Wildrake good-night, walked away.

Either a wholesome terror of encountering the old Jew, or the consciousness that the responsibility of mounting to his bed-chamber had fallen upon his own shoulders now that Nedlicott had left him, may account for the partial soberness which



Wildrake regained. He rose, and stumbled into the strange old hall, making repulsive grimaces at the expiring lamp. Here and there the words written upon the tablets in letters of gold upon the walls were readable, but for the most part hidden in shade: a solemn place even by daylight, but in the dead of night the solemnity seemed intense, almost awful, with this weird figure in the centre.

Presently Wildrake took a step forward, and then another, pausing at each stride to pass his long fingers over his face, and to make fresh grimaces at the light. By this eccentric process he reached his candle, applied it to the lamp, and then commenced to ascend, balancing himself like a man upon a tight-rope who seems bent, body and mind, on preventing himself from falling.

He gained his room at last. Placing his guttering candle on the table, among the empty glasses which still stood there, he changed his coat for his old grey dressing-gown, and threw himself upon his bed.

For some time he lay quite still, breathing heavily, and muttering incoherently, like one who is troubled with restless dreams. But suddenly he started up, leaned on his elbow, and listened. There was an expression of complete wakefulness in his eyes, and his hand shook as though attacked by palsy.

Still listening, he went softly towards the door and bent down with his trembling fingers on the latch, as if he expected every moment that some one would enter. Turning away presently with a look of disappointment, he began to pace to and fro,

stopping to listen at every turn. At length he fell into a chair, and, flinging his arms upon the table with a groan, covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out something intolerable, something overmastering.

He rose after a while, and, opening the cupboard near the fire-place, took down a large bluish bottle and poured a colourless liquid into a glass and drank it hastily.

Then he again sank wearily upon his bed, listening still, but gradually closing his eyes, as though overcome by the weight of an overpowering sleep.

By this time the candle on the table, having burnt down to the socket, went out, and the dawning light of a foggy day stole into the room and reached the figure of Wildrake. He was resting his head upon his arm with his face turned towards the

wall; and sleeping so soundly now, and lying so motionless, that, but for his low regular breathing, one might have believed him dead.

## CHAPTER X.

## DISCLOSURES.

WITH her hands pressed tightly together, Madame Hélène, standing near one of the windows of her room, waited anxiously for the return of Snowby from his visit to John Wildrake. The look on the handsome, passionate face was intensely painful: her cheeks were feverish, and her eyes filled frequently with hot tears as a picture rose before her of a miserable garret in the old city where her father, whom she had so thoughtlessly forsaken, dragged out his wretched life. She was

restlessly impatient to learn whether he was actually so destitute and broken-hearted as Paul Aldershaw had described him to his manager: it seemed to her to need strong confirmation before she could realize such a sad fatality.

It was past midnight. In an arm-chair by the fire, tired out at last, Katie had fallen fast asleep. There were no marks of care upon her dimpled cheeks, and the expression about her lips was playful; no sorrow had yet touched her young heart. While watching the girl sleeping there, without one real trouble on her conscience, Madame Hélène prayed fervently that she might never know such grief as that which had overtaken her, and destroyed all her own happiness in life.

At last the sound of wheels reached her ears; and next moment a cab came rat-

ting down the boulevard and stopped at Rose Villa. Madame Hélène put her hand quickly to her side, and sank into a chair. Katie started up with a dreamy look in her eyes.

‘Did father call me?’ said she.

‘No, Katie. But he has come home: I hear him on the staircase. Don’t leave me; ask him to come in. It is cold, and the fire in the parlour must have gone out hours ago.’

Kate ran to the door and met her father, as she always did, with open arms when he reached the top of the stairs.

A touching scene at any time for Madame Hélène to witness, but never so affecting as now. But she conquered her emotion, as she had been forced to do so often before an audience, and advanced to welcome the manager into her sitting-

room without a visible trace of agitation, except in her voice, which trembled slightly.

‘Katie has been keeping me company,’ said she. ‘I hope I have not done wrong to let her sit up so late?’

Snowby drew his daughter near him, and placed his arm round her neck.

‘I am afraid, Madame H  l  ne,’ he said, ‘that I am most to blame. But the fact is I have been kept in town much later than I expected. Much later.’

Madame H  l  ne looked swiftly into the manager’s face.

‘Not, I hope,’ she said, ‘for any reason which you consider serious?’

The manager’s expression became suddenly grave.

‘I will tell you,’ said he, ‘in two words, if it will not be tiring you?’



Hastening to assure Snowby that she was not in the least fatigued, Madame Hèlène wheeled a chair for him nearer the fire, and then sat down opposite with her back turned to the light. Katie placed herself upon the rug at her father's feet, and looked up with deep interest expressed in her young face.

‘What Mr. Aldershaw stated to me,’ the manager began, in a thoughtful tone, ‘about his old clerk, John Wildrake, is only too true; for as to the flight of a daughter from her father's home some years ago, and as to the drunken life which it was believed that Wildrake was leading, there can be no shadow of a doubt. I have been to-night to the comfortable garret, a room in an old house out of Thames Street, in which he lives. I have seen him with a strange look in his

face, which I shall never forget, when listening as he fancied to the footsteps of his daughter. I have seen him drink until he fell senseless from his chair : for I went with him to a tavern which he frequents : I went on purpose to judge what he was with my own eyes. No argument can, in my opinion, have any effect upon him now. He is beyond all hope ; a shattered, ruined man.'

Madame Hélène clasped her hands and said:

'Can no one save him?'

'No one.'

'Not even his daughter?'

The tone of distress in which she spoke brought a puzzled look to Snowby's face.

'If she returned?' said he.

'Yes.'

‘That would be more likely, now,’ said Snowby, ‘to kill him.’

‘Not if he knew all.’

‘All?’ said the manager, with a start, ‘all what?’

‘All that I, miserable woman that I am, alone could tell him.’

‘You, madame?’

‘Yes.’

‘I do not understand,’ said Snowby, still more perplexed.

‘I am the one for whose footsteps he listens,’ said Madame Hélène, in a low tone, ‘the wretched daughter whom he has lost.’

Snowby stared blankly at his lodger; then he rose slowly from his chair.

‘Come,’ said he, in a stern voice, and with a glance at Kate, as he moved towards the door.

Katie stood on the hearth-rug motionless, with her head bent.

‘Come,’ her father repeated. ‘This is not the place for you.’

Madame Hélène, rising hastily, appealed to the manager in a supplicating tone.

‘Do not judge me unheard,’ she pleaded. ‘Listen, for pity’s sake! If I have done wrong, I have suffered deeply for my wickedness.’

Thus appealed to, Snowby returned to the fireside, and, when Madame Hélène had resumed her seat, he again sat down, intimating that he was prepared to listen as she wished. Katie again threw herself at her father’s feet, but with her eyes now turned with a wondering look in them towards her friend.

‘Not more than fifteen years ago,’ Madame Hélène began, ‘my life was full

of happiness and promise. My poor father had very much the same position, as you know, which you now have in Mr. Aldershaw's firm. I received an excellent education, and my voice, which seemed to astonish everyone who heard it even when I was a child, was carefully trained, and, when I grew up, we were asked out a good deal. I sang wherever I went. I was fond of company, and liked being petted and admired. Among the grand houses to which we were invited, Mr. Aldershaw's was the one we went to perhaps most of all. It was there I met the man with whom I was mad enough to fall in love. It was indeed a madness, for I married him without my father's consent, even without his knowledge.'

For a moment Madame Hélène was

silent. The recollection of those days in which she met Sir Michael Valroy at the merchant prince's mansion in Tyburnia seemed to trouble her greatly. But she soon overcame these signs of distress, and continued.

‘I promised,’ said she, ‘never to mention the marriage to living soul. It was secretly performed in London, and we started for the Continent the same day. A lawyer, a great friend of my husband's, was our witness. The clergyman who married us is dead.’

‘What reason,’ Snowby thoughtfully demanded, ‘could your husband have for secrecy?’

‘No reason,’ said Madame Hélène, ‘except that he disliked my father, or perhaps, as I sometimes think, feared him. My husband occupies a position in

society above the one in which I was born. He is proud, quick-tempered, and very exacting. We have been separated for some years.'

'He is still alive?' said Snowby, with surprise.

'Yes.'

'And still holds you to your promise?'

'Let me explain. From the day I became this man's wife,' resumed Madame Hélène, 'I seldom had the courage even to think about my father. We led a life of constant gaiety, which made it easier for me to forget the past. We travelled all over Europe, never resting a month in one place. If I had had enough strength of mind to reflect, I might have acted differently. Time went on, and the separation came at last. I refused the allowance my husband offered me through his lawyer, this friend

who witnessed our marriage. I chose the stage as a profession, and succeeded. It became still easier to forget my father: for, when my thoughts reverted to the past, I threw my whole soul into the work which must be done to gain public approbation.'

Madame Hélène sighed deeply, and then concluded:

'But I was growing weary,' said she, 'weary at last of the nightly sounds of applause, which I had at first so eagerly courted, when an incident happened which led me to form a resolution that, even if I could not see my father, I would at least find out whether he was alive and still prosperous. I heard of you, Mr. Snowby, through a lady in Paris. She told me that you were a clerk in Mr. Aldershaw's house, in London. She had lived in your



house, I think, at one time. At any rate she knew that you wished to let part of your villa to some one who would be a suitable companion for your daughter. I made further enquiries through my bankers, and then wrote to you, as you know. I saw that by residing with you I could easily hear all I wished to hear without attracting suspicion. I was prepared to learn that my father was unhappy, or in ill-health. I even feared he might be dead. But I was not prepared for news of him such as you have brought home to-night.'

'And yet,' said Snowby, 'I have only confirmed what I mentioned about Mr. Wildrake in this very room several days ago. You could then have taken steps to see him . . .'

'Indeed I did,' said Madame Hélène. 'I went at once to this lawyer, who lives

in London, and implored him to gain my husband's consent to a meeting between my father and me. He promised to do his best. But he has neither written nor been to see me yet. Now,' she added, in a low voice, 'I have told you all.'

That night, long after the manager and his daughter had retired, Madame Hélène sat with a wakeful look in her eyes, pondering over the various scenes in her life since the time when she quitted her father's home to become the wife of Sir Michael Valroy. How quickly the years had gone by! They were years in which she had satisfied a foolish ambition. She was now reaping her harvest, with a wretched sense of reproachfulness and guilt. During those years she had been stepping thoughtlessly into every path in which she perceived a

gleam of sunshine, while her father was being daily driven by grief and shame into darkened ways. Was it too late to make some amends for the misery her conduct had occasioned? She had waited with impatience for several days for a response to her appeal, through Ludlaw, to Sir Michael Valroy. She could wait no longer. It was her duty to take some steps more stringent and decisive, in order to gain the consent of her husband to see her father.

No reason that could be deemed justifiable occurred to her mind which Sir Michael might put forward to bind her still to the promise she had made without purpose or reflection. Years had now passed: the necessity for action was desperately urgent. It was a matter of life and death. No obstacle should stand in

the way which would prevent her from rescuing her father from the ignominious plight into which he had fallen. She was comparatively rich: she would provide an agreeable home. For the rest of his life, she would devote herself to him. In some quiet spot, where they could regard their trouble as something half forgotten in the past, she would give him an earnest proof of her desire to gain his full forgiveness.

The dawn of the morning which found John Wildrake lying upon his bed, and sleeping so soundly, with his head resting on his arm, never grew much brighter upon that dull wintry day. A thick, November fog was hanging over the river when the sun rose; and when it set, towards four o'clock in the afternoon, the

fog was still impenetrable and motionless over the dismal city.

Wildrake never stirred. From day-break until the sun again went down, he lay in the same attitude, insensible to all that was going on in the world outside his gloomy garret. The noise of the heavy traffic lumbering through Thames Street to and from the docks failed to awaken him: he was deaf to the shrill whistle of steamers or of steam-tugs on the Thames, towing long black chains of barges against the tide, which never ceased its ebb and flow beneath his windows; nor could the cries which sometimes rose in the midst of other sounds succeed in rousing him. And when all these noises began to die out on the 'silent highway' and in the great thoroughfares, the fog thickened, and the night

became intensely chilly and dark. Still Wildrake slept on, with a peaceful look on his wrinkled face, and with the quiet breathing of a young child.

All day long he had lain in his bed-chamber undisturbed. Had he been dead his isolation could not have been greater. Seemingly, he was entirely forgotten.

Not entirely: for, when it had been dark for some hours, and there was not a sound within the old mansion, nor without, Wildrake's door was slowly opened, and Mimosa—the black patches on her face and a candle in her hand—crept in on tip-toe, and looked about with staring eyes, and with a mouth gaping wide, as though searching for something to fill the gap. She placed the candle on the table between the windows, and, stepping across

the room towards the bed, put her hand timidly on Wildrake's shoulder.

‘Master,’ she whispered, ‘are you asleep?’

He was so sound asleep, that he neither answered nor even moved a muscle. Mimosa glanced blankly around her, as though frightened. Then she began to shake Wildrake violently, as if she were seized with a panic. But, as soon as she ceased shaking him, he lay quite motionless as before.

‘It's the fog,’ said this strange little woman, suddenly fixing her eyes upon the candle. ‘It's been and stifled him!’

The fog had certainly entered the room : it was hovering about and hanging over the candle like a dim cloud. Mimosa, with sudden energy, hurried out upon the landing and soon came back with shavings and

lumps of coal in a shovel. She knelt down before the fireplace and began to lay the fire in a nervous manner, frequently adding to the black patches on her cheeks. Then she applied the candle to the shavings, and soon succeeded in producing a cheerful blaze. The fog in the room began to diminish, and Mimosa looked as hopefully towards the figure lying on the bed as her automatic face would permit. She then drew a chair in front of the hearth, and sitting down with her feet raised upon the fender she folded her arms and gazed vacantly at the flames.

So lost was she in thought—if such a condition of mind can be applied to one who seemed to be constantly more or less wanting—so dreamy, or abstracted, that when the door presently creaked she did not turn round. The old Jew, Mr. Isaacs,



was looking into the room with only his head visible from the black skull-cap to the long white beard.

‘Mimosa!’

The little woman started and jumped up from her chair.

‘What’s the matter?’ the Jew demanded.

She jerked her elbow towards the figure on the bed, and answered, in a whisper :

‘Something’s up.’

The Jew stepped into the room, and taking the candle in his hand held it over Wildrake, and bending down peered closely into his face.

‘He is a bad one!’ Mr. Isaacs emphatically declared, as he directed his gaze into the distance, and solemnly shook his head.

‘He has been playing one of his old tricks.

He'll play them once too often some day. It's a strong dose this time; as strong as he can stand, and perhaps stronger. I never did come across such a bad one, never.'

'It ain't the fog then, ain't it?'

The old Jew looked at Mimosa, and placed his hand on her shoulder.

'Something worse than that, my girl,' said he, 'something even worse than drink.'

'What's that?'

Mr. Isaacs pointed towards the mantelshelf where the bluish bottle still stood, out of which Wildrake had drunk a certain colourless liquid on the preceding night.

'A deadly draught,' said the Jew, impressively. 'When he thinks he can't sleep, he goes and gets it there.'

'Does he? I'll throw it away.'

‘No. He may never wake,’ the Jew predicted. ‘Touch nothing.’

Mimosa gaped at the bluish bottle and then at the figure on the bed.

‘Touch nothing,’ repeated the Jew, with emphasis, ‘but remain here until I return. I shall not be gone long.’

Once more he held the candle over Wildrake, and again looked keenly into his face. Then, placing the candle back upon the table, he hastened from the room.

A few minutes afterwards, Mimosa heard the heavy slam of the front door. She ran to the window and looked out eagerly into the night. The distant lamps down the dark river towards London Bridge showed only like blurred spaces of light which seemed to add intenseness to the thick, foggy atmosphere on every side. Peering down into Gable Court, the girl

observed a misty figure suddenly expand upon the pavement close under the door lamp, and then disappear; at the same time a hurried footstep caught her ear which almost instantly died away underneath the archway in the direction in which the figure had vanished. She turned from the window in alarm, and crept softly back to the hearth. Resuming her seat in front of the fire, she frequently cast a startled look over her shoulder towards the prostrate figure of Wildrake.

The figure which Mimosa had seen from the window to expand on the pavement under the door-lamp in Gable Court, and then to disappear, was that of the old Jew. Enveloped in a thick pea-jacket, and with a rough fur cap down to his

eyebrows and over his ears, Mr. Isaacs was hastening out into Thames Street, and making his way eastward through the thick fog.

It was not late ; but being a Saturday, and the night thoroughly uncongenial, the streets in the City were almost deserted. Those among the busy people who still remained abroad were passing with haste within the limited spaces of light under the lamps, and then as rapidly dwindling into misty phantoms. Everyone seemed anxiously bent upon discovering the nearest way, out of the damp and suffocating atmosphere, to their own homes.

Crossing Thames Street, and turning into one of the lanes leading towards St. Paul's, Mr. Isaacs presently reached the door of the little tobacco-shop where Nedlicott lived.

Stepping in, he found Mrs. Nedlicott behind the counter.

‘Is your son at home?’

‘Walk in, Mr. Isaacs,’ said Nedlicott’s mother, with a smile of recognition.

Mr. Isaacs took off his fur cap, and, turning down the collar of his coat as though to let out the fog, passed through the shop and entered the parlour. Nedlicott was seated over a cup of tea reading a manuscript in a brown-paper cover.

‘Anything amiss?’ inquired Mr. Cheadle’s secretary, looking up from his work into the Jew’s anxious face.

The old man gave him a significant nod.

‘Sit down, Mr. Isaacs,’ said Nedlicott, placing a chair near the fire.

‘No, thank you; I can’t stop a minute,’ said he; ‘but I thought you would like to know.’

‘What?’

‘He has swallowed another dose.’

‘A strong one?’

‘Very strong. We can’t wake him this time.’

‘That’s bad,’ Nedlicott replied. ‘What says the doctor?’

‘I’m on my way there now,’ said the Jew. ‘I thought I’d look in upon you first: I was afraid you might be gone, if I didn’t. You may be wanted, you know.’

‘Yes: I understand.’

‘Can you come with me?’

‘To see Wildrake?’ said Nedlicott.

‘Yes.’

‘Impossible! I’ve got an appointment with Mr. Cheadle.’

‘Still at Tarmouth?’ said the Jew.

‘No. He has returned to town.’

‘ Ah! Then you’ll look in later.’

‘ Yes. Though I fear,’ said the secretary, ‘ that it won’t be much before midnight. It’s my evening, you see, at the “Fresco.” I’m expected.’

‘ At midnight, then,’ said the Jew, moving towards the door, ‘ you’ll step over, eh?’

‘ You may count upon that,’ said Nedlicott, ‘ on my way home I shall not fail to call.’

At the door the Jew looked back, and said,

‘ You haven’t seen Wildrake’s friend again, have you?’

‘ Snowby?’ said Nedlicott.

The Jew nodded in his solemn manner.

‘ No. But I expect to meet him at the Fresco Club to-night.’

‘ That’s lucky,’ said Mr. Isaacs, gazing



thoughtfully into the distance, 'for, you see, Mr. Nedlicott, if my bad one yonder never wakes, as it's possible he may never do . . .'

'Quite possible, Mr. Isaacs.'

'Why, then, Mr. Snowby will be also wanted, eh?'

'I understand,' Nedlicott repeated, as before, in an expressive tone.

The Jew put on his fur cap and looked with keenness at Nedlicott.

'My bad one, you know,' said he, with his fingers on the door-handle, 'has found a friend in Mr. Snowby, or what seems to me like one. Mr. Snowby has only called once; but he has given him money, or lent it to him, which is the same thing. What can it mean? Not charity. There is some motive in the business. Men don't give away their money to such a one

as Wildrake without an object: not they.'

'There is a good reason for Mr. Snowby's interest in your lodger, Mr. Isaacs, I firmly believe,' said the secretary.

'I hope so,' the Jew replied, in a suspicious tone. 'But we must keep this friend in sight if we want to find out who the bad one is. For Mr. Snowby, depend upon it, knows all about him.'

'We shall see,' said Nedlicott.

'If Wildrake has such friends,' the Jew surmised, 'or even friends who can afford to pay half the sum which is owing for rent, I should like to know something about them. Here's a year passed since I've seen a penny. And now, I suppose,' he added, 'there's going to be a doctor's bill, or perhaps something worse.'

He pulled the cap down over his ear

with an emphatic tug, and shook his head solemnly.

‘A queer business,’ he concluded, ‘very queer. But I mustn’t stand here to gossip. He may be dead, if I do, before I get back. He’s a bad one, Mr. Nedlicott, a very bad one indeed.’

Buttoning his pea-jacket tightly round his throat, and still shaking his head, the old Jew hastily took leave of the secretary, and hurried out again into the foggy night.

## CHAPTER XI.

## REPRIMANDED.

WITHIN a large library, in a house in Cheyne Walk at Chelsea, sits Mr. Cheadle, the dramatist, waiting with impatience the arrival of his secretary Ted Nedlicott.

Ever since the night of Paul Aldershaw's sudden and unexpected appearance at the chalet at Tarmouth, which led to the discovery of Roy Valroy and Marion upon the balcony together, Mr. Cheadle has been plotting to bring about another 'scene' in the 'comedy.' His expectations reach a

climax soon after his return to town. A letter arrives from the merchant prince inviting him and his wife to dinner; and, when the evening comes round the dramatist is keen to start for Tyburnia. But there is business with his secretary, of a theatrical nature, which must be settled first.

Mr. Cheadle starts up from his chair a dozen times, looks at his watch, and sinks down again.

‘I wonder,’ he ejaculates, ‘what makes Nedlicott so late?’

At last there is a knock at the door, and in walks Nedlicott, brisk in his manner, and with the bundle of MS. in the brown-paper cover under his arm.

‘What’s that?’ the dramatist demands, with his jovial eyes fixed upon the bundle.

“‘Nobs.”’

‘My comedy? It’s finished!’

‘Not yet,’ Nedlicott declares; ‘Miss Pennethorne is jealous.’

‘But,’ the dramatist questions, ‘is that anything new?’

‘No,’ says the secretary, ‘but her signs of indisposition begin to alarm me.’

‘What can she want?’

‘More lines.’

‘Why,’ Mr. Cheadle affirms, ‘her *rôle* is too long already.’

Nedlicott strokes his chin.

‘I think,’ says he, ‘that, if you were to shorten Miss Thornycroft’s part, Miss Pennethorne would recover.’

The dramatist seats himself at his desk.

‘That’s easily done!’

He holds a consultation with his secretary over each line: the operation of ‘cutting down’ is soon completed, and Mr. Cheadle

hands back to Nedlicott the prompter's copy of his new and original comedy 'Nobs,' in its revised form.

There are other matters, however, of importance, beside Thornycroft and Penne-thorne, which need discussion: among them the question arises as to whether one of the principal actors in 'Nobs,' upon whose head a piece of stage scenery has accidentally fallen during rehearsal, will be able to appear upon the first night. But everything is at last satisfactorily arranged between Mr. Cheadle and his secretary. Nedlicott then takes his leave, and hastens away in his cab, through the fog, to the Fresco Club.

Eager for the 'scene' with the merchant prince, Mr. Cheadle seats himself in his carriage beside his wife in one of his most dramatic moods.

‘I am going to receive a reprimand,’ says he, as they drive towards Tyburnia. ‘Aldershaw is evidently in earnest.’

‘We were wrong,’ says Ada Cheadle, in a tone of repentance.

‘Very wrong. As Aldershaw’s relations, we should never have allowed a Valroy to enter our house.’

‘It is not too late, perhaps,’ Ada suggests, ‘to mend matters even now.’

‘What!’ says the dramatist, aghast; ‘would you alter the comedy?’

Ada makes no reply. She leans back languidly, and closes her eyes.

Their reception by Paul Aldershaw—standing in the drawing-room, with his back to the fire—is chilling. But Mr. Cheadle is not discouraged.

‘Where is Marion?’ says he, looking about with a genial smile.



Marion enters, as he speaks, from her boudoir adjoining. There is something defiant in her tall figure, as well as in her face. She holds herself erect as she steps across the room to embrace her cousin Ada, and to shake hands with Mr. Cheadle.

Dinner is announced, for there are to be no other guests. Miss Blessitt, Marion's ex-governess, glides into the room like Banco's ghost when the others have taken their places, and sinks into her seat. She is solemn, angular, and pale. She moves her eyes from one person to another, whenever a remark is made, without moving her neck. But Miss Blessitt never utters a word; she always seems to be saying to herself: 'I know my position. You may try to drag me into the conversation, but you can't make me speak.'

Mr. Cheadle is very talkative. He has

a great store of dramatic anecdotes ; he relates one after another in his liveliest style. Paul Aldershaw takes no pains to disguise the fact that these stories fail to interest him. The ladies are amused, but the situation is awkward, and their faces express their sense of relief when the time arrives for them to retire.

‘Cheadle,’ says Paul Aldershaw, as soon as they are alone, ‘I want to have a little serious talk with you. Will you smoke?’

‘I have no objection to a cigar.’

‘Let us take our coffee, then,’ says the merchant, rising, ‘in the smoking-room.’

They step into the oriental divan. The dramatist throws himself upon a lounge and lights his cigar ; the coffee is served ; the merchant prince seats himself opposite to Mr. Cheadle, and, with his legs crossed reposefully, ‘opens the scene.’

‘Cheadle,’ says he, ‘how is it that I found a gentleman named Valroy a visitor at your house?’

Mr. Cheadle promptly replies :

‘For a dramatic purpose.’

‘Is he an actor, then?’

‘No,’ Mr. Cheadle confesses, ‘although he seems disposed to play a part.’

‘Let us understand each other,’ says the merchant, with some signs of impatience. ‘I saw him that evening on your balcony with Marion. Has that anything to do with the part he seems disposed to play?’

‘I cannot deny,’ Mr. Cheadle owns, with twinkling eyes, ‘that it has.’

‘Then all I can say is,’ remarks Paul Aldershaw, ‘that I consider your conduct extremely reprehensible.’

Mr. Cheadle frankly admits that.

‘Not,’ says the merchant, ‘that I have any wish to dictate to you who you should invite to your house, or who you should not. If in yours, or your wife’s opinion, a scoundrel or any of his relations are the sort of people to cultivate, you have unquestionably a right to do so. But, at the same time, it is only reasonable to expect that you will give those among your friends who have no particular desire to meet such people, some warning of your intention.’

‘Scoundrel?’ mutters Mr. Cheadle, with a good-humoured smile.

‘They can then, you know,’ says Paul Aldershaw, without heeding the interruption, ‘stay away. Or,’ he adds, ‘if they have daughters, they can keep them at home out of such society. You will,

I am sure, perceive the justice of my remark.'

'But,' inquires Mr. Cheadle, argumentatively, 'in this case, does it quite apply?'

'No one,' says the merchant, 'has had better means of judging whether the man I have just mentioned was fit company for Marion or not. It applies most emphatically to him. Why have you ever admitted such a person, knowing what you know about his family, even inside your gate?'

The dramatist is candid: no one can accuse him of not being that. He owns to his weakness. He is, as he has often repeated, a slave to his art. When this situation occurred to him, he explains, regardless of the consequences, he planned

a meeting between Roy Valroy and Marion.

‘It’s a little comedy,’ Mr. Cheadle ends up by remarking, ‘a little comedy, in fact, of which I have—from a dramatic point of view—reason to be proud.’

Paul Aldershaw, without changing his reposeful attitude, darts an angry look at the dramatist.

‘Cheadle,’ says he, ‘I am willing to make every allowance for your mode of expressing yourself: I am even ready to believe that you have no intention of being offensive. Your style of language, indeed, may be considered among your theatrical friends a mark of your ability. I gave you credit, however, for possessing greater discrimination than to reckon me among that class of your admirers.’

In this quiet, but severe manner the

merchant gives vent to his wrath. But Mr. Cheadle is not the least disconcerted. His eyes sparkle with humour ; and he regards Paul Aldershaw, with a criticising twist of the neck, as though watching an actor in one of his comedies.

‘What I wished to convey,’ the dramatist explains, ‘when I spoke of a little comedy, is simply this. Here we have for the hero, let us say, a man of family ; in fact, the brother of a baronet. And,’ he adds, ‘for the heroine, the daughter of a gentleman of fortune. The two young people meet in society. They admire each other ; and, being both gifted, they interest each other. Then comes the dramatic situation. There is reason to conjecture that any inclination to marry would be opposed.’

‘Most decidedly.’

Putting his cigar to his lips, Mr. Cheadle smokes in silence for a moment. He then continues :

‘The heroine’s father has a great antipathy to the hero’s family. No argument showing that the hero is not accountable for his brother’s conduct; no facts which can be set down to prove that the hero is a thorough man of honour will have any avail. Is not that true comedy?’

‘Upon my word, Cheadle,’ says the merchant, with a dark frown, ‘you are irrepressible. If you cannot take a serious view of the subject, we had better not prolong this conversation.’

‘My dear Aldershaw,’ Mr. Cheadle persuasively demands, ‘are you not somewhat unreasonable? You seem to expect too much of me. Grow serious over



comedy? Impossible! In spite,' the dramatist suddenly adds, 'in spite of all you may do to oppose it, the little comedy which has begun will go on till the curtain falls on the last act! Why, the fact is, to be thoroughly candid with you, Roy Valroy is seriously in love with your daughter.'

'And Marion?' says Paul Aldershaw, quickly. 'You will be telling me next that she cares for this fellow.'

'No: at least, not at present,' says the dramatist.

'If I thought she did . . . ' Paul Aldershaw begins.

Mr. Cheadle looks into the merchant prince's face anxiously for a conclusion to the sentence. But he does not finish it, except by a passing flash of passion in his eyes, which the author compre-

hends and admires as being thoroughly dramatic.

There is a long pause. Meanwhile, Paul Aldershaw, having risen from his seat, commences to pace up and down, with his head bent thoughtfully, and his hands clasped behind his back. Mr. Cheadle sits watching him, and waiting for him to break the silence.

‘I was wrong,’ says the merchant prince at last, as though giving expression to his meditations rather than addressing the dramatist, ‘very wrong not to speak to Marion a year since, before she went out into the world, of what happened in our family long ago. She would then have been prepared to meet the danger which has come upon her. I most fervently hope that it may not be too late to speak even now. I should never rest if I

thought she loved anyone whom I could not receive at my house. I should never rest night or day, if I thought it possible that she could conceive the slightest affection for a Valroy.'

Stopping at this point, and turning towards Mr. Cheadle, the merchant looks him severely in the face.

'I believed,' says he, 'that Marion would be protected, at least by her relations, from such a calamity as the one which threatens her at this moment. I believed that her Cousin Ada would have watched over her like an elder sister, and kept her out of the society of people of whom she knew I should disapprove. If I had not believed this, I should never have permitted Marion to visit you during your stay at Tarmouth.'

'Give her relations credit, at any rate,'

says Mr. Cheadle, 'for having mentioned to you, when they invited Marion to Tarmouth, that Lord Dwyver was cruising about in the neighbourhood. It is not, after all, a comedy entirely of my contrivance.'

'Lord Dwyver,' says the merchant prince, resuming his seat and his reposeful attitude, 'belongs to a class of society of a very different stamp. I have a strong friendship, as you know, for the young man. Nothing, in fact, would give me greater pleasure than to form an alliance with the family of Mounthaw. That, however,' he adds, 'is another question.'

'Not quite,' says Mr. Cheadle. 'Lord Dwyver and Roy Valroy are playing parts in the same comedy. As I said to my wife the other day, a little jealousy—from a dramatic point of view—is always ad-

visable. Now, in my opinion, Dwyver is somewhat piqued at the discovery that he is not without a rival. He was expected at Tarmouth with his yacht the day after you were there.'

'How is it,' Paul Aldershaw quickly demands, 'that you omitted to mention that? I should have liked to have shaken hands with him: I should have liked very much to have had a little talk with Lord Mounthaw's son.'

'If I had known,' says Mr. Cheadle, 'that you were coming to take Marion away, I should have arranged things differently.'

'Ah!'

'Your sudden appearance on the scene, you know,' says Mr. Cheadle, 'was a dramatic surprise.'

'Ah!'

‘We had planned,’ Mr. Cheadle goes on to remark, ‘that Lord Dwyver should see a good deal more of Marion. But you ran off with her, you know—you ran off with her.’

‘For a very good reason,’ says Paul Aldershaw. ‘But I should have liked to have seen something of my young friend before we left. And so,’ he adds, thoughtfully, ‘so perhaps would Marion.’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘We must fix a day,’ the merchant prince continues, ‘for a little dinner-party here, and invite Lord Dwyver. I should not wish him to think that I am otherwise than delighted to know that it pleases him to pay Marion some attention.’

‘Very naturally.’

‘They have known each other,’ pursues

the merchant, 'though not very intimately, ever since they were children. They have played together in the home park at Mounthaw. They have ridden out on their ponies together more than once. On one occasion, I remember, Marion's pony ran away, and, if young Dwyver had not galloped after her and caught the rein, she would probably have been thrown. I don't suppose they have forgotten that.'

'Far too dramatic,' says Mr. Cheadle, 'to be forgotten.'

'They will probably see something of each other,' the merchant predicts, 'at Mounthaw Castle, if I can spare the time to run down to my property, which adjoins, you know, during this winter. Now that they have been thrown together again, I have no doubt it would be agree-

able both to Marion and to Lord Mount-haw's son to meet there.'

'Quite consistent,' says Mr. Cheadle, 'with the comedy.'

'But as to this Valroy,' says Paul Alder-shaw, with another dark frown, 'no time must be lost in warning Marion against him. I do not know, at present, how much it will be necessary to break to her of the past. Not a word has ever been broached between us on the subject. Yet something should be told to her, something that will show her that to continue her acquaintance with this gentleman would meet with my displeasure; no doubt, indeed, must be left in her mind that I should exercise the most strenuous opposition to any proposals of marriage from such a quarter. I would make almost any sacrifice which I thought would result



in happiness for Marion. But such a sacrifice as that it would be unnatural to expect. Perhaps,' the merchant prince adds, with a glance at Mr. Cheadle, 'perhaps your wife would undertake to express my views to Marion on this subject. What do you think?'

'I think,' says Mr. Cheadle, 'that her cousin Ada is the very person—from a dramatic point of view—who should be chosen to communicate your wishes to Marion.'

'That,' says Paul Aldershaw, 'is my opinion. Ada must know, better than you or I can, how much to say and how much to conceal. She is probably in Marion's confidence, and if there is any reason for alarm, owing to any signs of partiality for this fellow Valroy, she will not hesitate to mention the whole truth. If, however,

there is no serious display of sentiment there will be no necessity to speak to Marion of the Valroy family except as one which her father has an intense aversion to : an intense aversion.'

'I understand,' says Mr. Cheadle.

'There would be no objection,' says Paul Aldershaw, 'if Ada also took some opportunity of awakening a further interest in Lord Dwyver. Not that I have ever taken any pains to hide from Marion my sincere admiration for Lord Mounthaw's son : on the contrary, I never lose a chance of praising my young friend, for he is really deserving of the highest praise. But if your wife extols him also, why all the better, you understand, why all the better, eh ?'

'Yes,' says Mr. Cheadle, 'all the better—from a dramatic point of view.'

‘That,’ Paul Aldershaw says, meditative-ly, ‘is, I think, all that I had to say to you about Marion. What I wish, and what I have tried to impress upon you, is that the society you may invite her to meet at your house shall always be—if your theatrical connection will admit of it—perfectly select. Otherwise, I must forbid her to visit you. I should be sorry to put any restraint upon Marion’s actions: I should be excessively sorry to separate her from her cousin Ada, who is almost her only friend. But that would clearly be my duty, if anything of a nature resembling what, in fact, we have been talking about should occur again. We will now,’ concludes the merchant prince, rising from his seat, ‘if you have no objection, join the ladies.’

Mr. Cheadle assents: and in this manner

the curtain falls, as the dramatist would express it, on another scene in Valroy comedy.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A QUIET PIPE.

AT the door of the Fresco Club Nedlicott met Snowby.

‘I have just seen Wildrake,’ said Paul Aldershaw’s manager, as soon as he had shaken hands with Mr. Cheadle’s secretary.

‘How is he?’

‘Still sleeping.’

They stood on the pavement in the fog, regarding each other with anxious faces.

‘The doctor appears doubtful,’ Snowby declared, ‘whether he will recover. He has done all that can be done. Another hour or two will decide the question.’

‘You know what he drinks?’

Snowby nodded.

‘It’s a wonder,’ said he, ‘that he is still alive.’

The two men mounted the steps. The Fresco Club, the centre house in a block of buildings, faced the Thames Embankment. The terrace seemed to be resting upon black clouds, so dense and dark lay the fog on the river below.

‘Won’t you come in?’ said Nedlicott, noticing a slight hesitation in Snowby’s manner.

‘Not to-night,’ said Snowby, glancing towards the bright and warm-looking club hall from whence the stifled sound of

music and laughter struck upon his ear ;  
'another evening.'

'Are you going back,' said Nedlicott, 'to see Wildrake ?'

'Yes : I am alarmed about him.'

'Give me five minutes,' said Nedlicott, 'and then we'll go together.'

Snowby readily consented : and Nedlicott led the way through the hall, and up the staircase, to the first-floor. Here he stopped, and turned to Snowby with a mysterious look, and said, in a dramatic whisper :

'Hush ! Follow me.'

He opened the door facing him. They found themselves in a good-sized dining-room, with small tables ranged round the walls. At the further end was a curtained entrance, to which Nedlicott pointed, and, still whispering, said :

‘The music-room. They are expecting me there now.’

‘To sing?’ Snowby inquired.

‘Yes. I am expected to sing.’

‘Shall you?’

‘No,’ said Nedlicott, ‘we will have a glass of wine, and then make our escape. I cannot sing comic songs to-night. Wild-rake has upset me.’

He gave instructions to a servant who was in attendance; and then he and Snowby sat down at one of the tables to drink their wine.

‘Would you like,’ said Nedlicott, presently, ‘to have a peep at them?’

Snowby confessed to a sense of curiosity.

‘Be careful, then,’ whispered Mr. Cheadle’s secretary, ‘be very careful not to expose me to view. If you do, there will



be cries for me to appear, and our escape will be impossible.'

Snowby drew the curtain cautiously aside. It was a large and lofty room, and crowded to overflowing with men dressed, for the most part artistically, in brown velvet coats and coloured neckties; and many of them wore their hair long, and thrown back from their foreheads. The chairs were arranged in rows. In a corner of the room there was a piano, and on one side of it stood a long table, facing the audience, at which was seated a young man with a bald head, surrounded by friends. Pictures occupied every available space upon the walls. The ceiling was painted with nude figures floating in clouds—an unnecessary detail, as the room was filled with tobacco smoke, which answered the same end. Between the long table and the

piano, at the moment when Snowby looked in upon this jovial assembly, a member of the Fresco Club was giving imitations of popular actors. He presently concluded, and retired to his seat, somewhere in the smoke, amidst a loud burst of applause.

‘Now is the moment,’ said Nedlicott, touching Snowby on the arm, ‘to make our escape.’

With the same droll look of mystery on his face, Nedlicott hastened to quit the ‘Fresco,’ accompanied by the manager. At the club door they stepped into a cab and drove towards Wildrake’s lodgings in the city.

Snowby’s interest in Wildrake had greatly increased since the strange confession on the part of his lodger. The responsibility of keeping Mr. Aldershaw’s old clerk out of mischief had become

grave in the extreme. If anything serious should ever happen through his neglect, not only would the merchant prince's displeasure be incurred, but the shock to Madame Hélène, under existing circumstances, would be crushing. Without the active co-operation of his newly-discovered friend, Nedlicott, the manager would have been perplexed beyond measure. But, with the kind-hearted and energetic support of one who had for some time been acquainted with Wildrake's eccentric habits and mode of life, Snowby experienced a sense of relief. In case of need, he could call Nedlicott to his aid to answer for his exact conduct in this affair.

As they entered the gateway of the old court-yard the clock of St. Paul's struck eight.

‘Shylock will be surprised,’ said Nedlicott, ‘to see me so early.’

‘Who?’ inquired Snowby.

‘Wildrake’s landlord,’ Nedlicott explained.

When the old Jew presently let them into the sombre hall there was a hopeful look on his face. The ‘Bad One,’ as he hastened to acquaint his visitors, had ‘come to his senses,’ and seemed rather invigorated than weakened by his long sleep.

‘Shall we go up?’ said the manager.

‘No,’ said Nedlicott, ‘I would not advise that now.’

‘You are right,’ said the Jew, with an expressive nod. ‘He never needed excitement less than he does to-night.’

So the two men took leave of Mr. Isaacs, and wandered out into Thames

Street in an unsettled state of mind. The favourable turn events had taken with regard to John Wildrake had relieved both; but it was not so easy to recover from the depression which the incident had occasioned.

‘What do you propose?’ said the secretary. ‘I have no heart for the Fresco Club this evening.’

‘I propose,’ said Snowby, ‘that you should come down to my little place at Brixton, and smoke a quiet pipe. There is nothing,’ added the manager, ‘like the domestic hearth on a cold foggy night such as this.’

Nedlicott thankfully accepted the invitation. It was seldom, owing to his professional duties, that he could call an evening his own. If by chance one of Mr. Cheadle’s comedies was not being acted,

there was sure to be a rehearsal which detained the secretary at the theatre until nearly midnight. On Sundays he never stirred out of doors : it was the one day in the week which he devoted to his mother. It was a real day of rest for both. Nedlicott ceased to think of Mr. Cheadle and his dramatic views of life, and the old lady showed no signs of being haunted by the shadows of customers. The shutters of the little shop were put up ; and they sat together in the parlour undisturbed. That had been Nedlicott's custom ever since he was a boy, a custom which no worldly pleasures had yet tempted him to break through.

As Snowby entered the hall of his villa, followed by Nedlicott, a light step was heard on the stairs. The next moment Katie

appeared ; and, having no eyes except for the manager, she threw her arms round his neck in her most natural and charming manner.

‘Why, father,’ said she, ‘I never expected to see you for hours.’

Suddenly she caught sight of Nedlicott. He was standing, hat in hand, behind her father, regarding her with a glance of unlimited admiration.

The secretary was a decidedly good-looking man. His features were regular and full of a playful, kind-natured expression. His long fair moustache suited his carefully-studied artistic style of dress. His eyes were dark and handsome.

A deep blush mounted to Katie’s pretty face, and she seemed disposed in her confusion to beat a quick retreat.

‘Mr. Nedlicott,’ said Snowby, hastening

to introduce the secretary, 'has come to have a bit of supper with us, and a quiet pipe. Where can we get warm, Katie, this wretched night, and make ourselves generally comfortable?'

'There is a good fire,' suggested Katie, with a swift, bashful look at the visitor, 'down stairs.'

'In the snugger?'

'Yes, father.'

Snowby turned enquiringly towards Nedlicott.

'What shall you say,' he demanded, 'if we ask you to allow us to drop all ceremony and take you into our little room below?'

'I shall consider myself honoured,' said Nedlicott, with a laughing glance at Katie.

'That's settled then,' said Snowby, cheer-



fully, 'Katie, my dear, will you show the way?'

Nedlicott had been living until to-night under the impression that his mother's small parlour, behind the little shop, was the coziest in Christendom. But the snugger, as soon as he stepped into it, appeared to him even more cozy. Every corner of the room looked so neat and bright and agreeable; the curtains were so closely drawn, and the arm-chairs were placed so near the hearth that one might have imagined that the fact of their coming in, cold and depressed, out of the fog, had been anxiously anticipated; for on entering, all sense of inquietude, all chilliness seemed suddenly removed.

Could the sprightly figure of Kate Snowby, bending over the fire to stir it into a brighter blaze, have inspired this

reflection on Nedlicott's part? Katie's cheerful presence would have made any room appear homely and inviting. So, at least, thought Nedlicott, who watched her movements with an interest which it would have taken him no trouble to explain. He was enchanted. Never had mortal man seen anyone with such winning manners! Every look and action was full of fascination for him.

‘Make yourself at home,’ said Snowby, motioning Nedlicott to the hearth with a hospitable wave of the hand. ‘You will always be welcome.’

The artless way in which Katie assisted the servant to lay the cloth for supper, raised her still higher in Nedlicott's estimation. There was no pretence at playing the grand lady. She was the unaffected girl who had household duties

to perform. The presence of a stranger suggested to her no reason for changing her simple character.

When the cloth had been removed, Katie came and sat down quietly beside her father, and filled his pipe for him, as she had done ever since she was a child.

‘I thought,’ said Nedlicott, who was comfortably seated in a chair opposite the manager, ‘I thought, until I met you at the Loafers’ Hall, that the “Bad One,” as Shylock calls him, had no friends.’

‘Wildrake,’ said Snowby, ‘has had one powerful friend all his life. His name, I may tell you in strict confidence, is Paul Aldershaw.’

‘Indeed?’

‘Yes. It is only just,’ continued the manager, ‘that you who have shown Wildrake so much kindness, should know this. The man was a clerk for many years in Mr. Aldershaw’s house. A great trouble overtook him. He broke down under the weight of it. He was forced to resign his situation.’

‘Since then,’ said Nedlicott, ‘he has been drifting.’

‘Precisely. From time to time he has applied to Mr. Aldershaw for assistance. He has, I believe, never been refused. Lately, however, he has grown troublesome ; and, in one of his drunken fits, he had the hardiness to pay Mr. Aldershaw a visit at the office. This annoying circumstance induced Mr. Aldershaw to place Wildrake, in a sense, under my charge. I don’t know,’ added Snowby, ‘whether I

mentioned to you that I am Mr. Aldershaw's manager?'

'No,' said Nedlicott, 'you had not mentioned that.'

'The night,' Snowby went on, 'the night upon which we were so fortunate as to meet at the Loafers' Hall was my first experience with Wildrake. I can never thank you enough for coming so promptly to the rescue.'

'It was no more,' said Nedlicott, with a smile, 'than I had previously done a hundred times. The "Loafers'" is a favourite tavern with actors; and, on my way home I look in, on business as much as pleasure. Wildrake, as I soon found out, lived in the same direction as I did. That is how we first became acquainted.'

Katie, looking up at Nedlicott, ventured to inquire :

‘Is that long ago?’

‘Ten years at least,’ said he, ‘I can remember him when I was almost a boy. At that time, long before I became Mr. Cheadle’s secretary, I frequently saw Wildrake seated on the doorstep of the old house where he still lodges. It has always been my habit, if I do not find him at the tavern, to take a peep in at the gateway as I pass to see whether he is sitting there; and many a time, I do not doubt, have I saved him from spending the night upon his steps by opening the door for him with his latch-key.’

‘A strange character,’ said Snowby.

‘Strange indeed,’ said Nedlicott, with an earnest look. ‘That footstep which he fancies that he hears—which, in fact, has for a long time haunted him—has

become a complete mania. It is that, more than anything, which is wearing him out. He can get no natural sleep. At times, when he is in his most restless mode, he wanders abroad all night long; he has the footstep in his ear, which he takes to be his daughter's, and he follows this imaginary sound through the dark and silent streets of the City. I have often found him wandering after midnight in the narrow courts and alleys around the old city churches and churchyards, and such-like dismal haunts, constantly stopping to listen, and then wandering on again.'

'How very sad!' said Katie, with tears in her eyes.

'Yes,' said Nedlicott. 'It is one out of many of those melancholy sights which I, who am obliged to be out later than

most men, meet with along my beaten track, as I call it, through Thames Street to my mother's home.'

After a moment's pause, Nedlicott added,

'The time is past, I fear, for reclaiming Wildrake. But I am rejoiced to hear you say that he has a friend; for I need not count him now among the miserable crowd. It will not be a case for the workhouse, after all, as I was afraid it would be some day.'

'No,' said Snowby, 'it is not so bad as that. I cannot explain the situation to-night. The story of his life, as Katie and I have lately learnt, is very painful. But the time is not far distant, I hope, when everything will be done to find John Wildrake a more congenial home than his present garret. And,' added the manager,



‘there is at least one I know who will express a heartfelt gratitude to you for all the kindness you have shown towards this unfortunate man.’

‘Indeed,’ said Katie, fervently, ‘indeed, there is more than one.’

No expressions of gratitude, if any were his due, could recompense Nedlicott as did Katie’s look or her tone of voice as she uttered these simple words. He was amply requited if she recognised an atom of merit in his conduct towards Wildrake. He scarcely dared to hope that so trivial an action as that of interesting himself in this broken-down man could induce her to give a second thought to his existence ; but, if such a consequence were possible, the current of his life might be changed.

That night, on his road home, Nedli-

cott was building castles in the air, in which uncertain edifices Kate Snowby lived and moved. He recalled over and over again every word, every look, from the moment he entered the villa at Brixton until he took his leave; for the sound of her voice and the varying expression on her face still seemed to abide with him after he had quitted her presence.

The fog hung thick and motionless over the city, as it had hung all day, when Nedlicott reached Thames Street and made his way towards the little shop in the narrow lane near St. Paul's. He let himself into the house, and crept noiselessly upstairs to his bed-room on the first-floor. It was small, but very orderly, and characteristic of Mr. Cheadle's secretary. On a writing-table under the window there was a quantity of MS. in the conventional

brown-paper binding. The walls were covered with theatrical portraits; and over the mantel-shelf, among sundry play-bills, were a number of photographs of histrionic interest. A book-case against the wall in a corner held Nedlicott's library; it principally consisted of the British drama and an old edition of Pepys' diary in several volumes.

There was a small fire in the grate. Nedlicott took down from the shelf a volume of the diary, lit his pipe, and drew his chair towards the hearth.

It had been his habit for years to read, before retiring, a page out of the great journal: for Nedlicott, since he was a boy, had never been weary of following Mr. Pepys to the court; or to the King's Theatre, where he sat near the king and the Duke of York, and saw 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'

But Pepys' diary had lost its interest for Nedlicott. The voice of Kate Snowby sounded too pleasantly in his ears: and, although he continued to read, he had no conception of what the diary was recording; for he seemed to be carrying on a conversation all the while in the snuggerly with Kate. Indeed, it is doubtful whether Pepys himself could have got a sentence into the secretary's head had he appeared in the flesh and gone on gossiping about the court, or the play, all night long.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNCHANGED.

ON a certain afternoon, which need not be specified, Roy Valroy paid a visit to the chambers in Pump Court.

His brain was agitated with thoughts of Marion. He had learnt that the girl would 'appear,' as Mr. Cheadle expressed it, at his house to-day; and that if the 'hero' did not call (at an hour proposed) a scene in the comedy would be lost: a 'scene,' as the dramatist assured him, 'which—from a dramatic point of view—might be made highly effective.'

To meet Marion, as it will be surmised, Roy Valroy was willing to submit to this theatrical language, though it was possibly not very gratifying to be told that the 'situation' was one which created, in the mind of Mr. Cheadle, a motive for comedy ; but so deep was his love for Marion that Valroy was prepared to undergo any affliction which would bring him, even for one hour, into Marion's presence.

'Valroy,' said Ludlaw, looking up from legal documents and throwing himself back in his chair, 'I begin to think that I owe you an apology.'

'I do not understand,' said Roy, as he leant against the mantel-shelf negligently.

'Let me explain. When,' said Ludlaw, 'I asked you to accept a joint share with me in these rooms I intended that you

should have enough space in them to wield a pen, even if you were not disposed to follow conscientiously the legal profession. You have expressed an ambition to make literature your goal. Has it been possible in this place to prosecute your studies, or even to carry out any plan of work? No. I have impeded you at every step. You have been obliged to take to flight, whenever you have had an inspiration, into a more congenial atmosphere.'

'You talk,' said Valroy, 'as though I had the habits of a swallow.'

'For years,' pursued Ludlaw, I 'have been encroaching upon you in these chambers. I drive you, with my heaps of papers, from every position you take up. There is not a corner which you can call your own.'

‘Is not the hearth-rug,’ Valroy enquired, ‘still neutral ground?’

‘There is no table,’ Ludlaw went on, casting his eyes about him, ‘not even a chair, except the one in which I sit, which remains unencumbered. I am positively in possession.’

Valroy shrugged his shoulders and broke into a smile.

‘Nine points in the law,’ said he.

‘Then,’ the barrister continued, with a wave of his hand towards a side door, ‘there’s your bed-room. It is invaded by my boxes, bundles of old briefs, books, and in fact all the hostile paraphernalia which belongs and appertains to our learned calling.’

‘Disturb nothing,’ said Roy. ‘*Requiescant in pace.*’

‘Perhaps,’ replied Ludlaw, ‘you are



right. If you seriously contemplate matrimony, nothing will be gained by a sudden reform of my conduct. I have become confirmed in my habits. My papers may appear to you to be in a state of chaos: but that is of no consequence to you. To my thinking they are admirably arranged. I know at a glance where to lay my hand on any document. Every man has his own method of work: you see mine. A scheme of re-adjustment,' the barrister confessed, 'may possibly some day have to be considered: but not yet: that is an occupation which I reserve for my declining days. It will be some consolation to have it said of me, when I am dead, that I had a well-regulated mind, and that I left my documents behind me in perfect order.'

'Your epitaph shall be,' remarked

Valroy, "Deeds not words." I hope, however, that you will not mention in your will that you wish your papers buried with you. They would fill a whole cemetery.'

'You are strangely facetious. What is the matter, my learned friend?' said Ludlaw. 'Sit down. I must get ready to start. I have business with your brother.'

'To-night? I had hoped you would dine with me at the club.'

'Impossible,' Ludlaw declared, rising slowly. 'The business is urgent.'

Valroy threw himself into the vacated chair, and stretched his legs towards the fire, while Ludlaw retreated into an adjoining room.

It would have given energy to Valroy's character could he have entertained a

remote prospect of making Marion Aldershaw his wife. He was ambitious; but it was the ambition which needs an object.

To leave Ludlaw in sole possession of the chambers, and to work out a career for himself, had long been a latent thought; for he was one of those young men of fortune whose intellect, education, and knowledge of the world would have enabled him to achieve distinction. He had studied law as a mere pastime, seldom residing in chambers after he had been called to the bar.

Since he had left college, indeed, he had spent some years in travel: and the insight he had acquired concerning men and their ways in several European capitals was varied, if not profound. He had had from boyhood the advantage of Lud-

law's companionship: and the result of association with such a man was in many respects beneficial; for the barrister frequently joined Valroy, during vacation time, in his foreign peregrinations.

Ludlaw, now reappearing in coat and hat, Roy Valroy rose from the arm-chair, and the two friends strolled out of the chambers together.

'There is some talk, Cheadle tells me,' said Roy, as they went through the quiet courts and passages towards the Temple gateway, 'about a marriage between Marion and young Dwyver.'

'An old notion,' said Ludlaw, 'of Paul Aldershaw's.'

'Yes. The Mounthaw estate,' replied Valroy, 'adjoins Aldershaw's property in Yorkshire.'

Ludlaw took Valroy's arm. They walk-

ed up and down the Cloisters for a while in silence.

‘That fact,’ said Ludlaw, with a meaning glance, ‘should interest you deeply.’

‘In what way?’

‘Simply this,’ said Ludlaw. ‘Mounthaw Castle may some day be yours. Your grandfather, I need not remind you, was a cousin of the late Earl of Mounthaw. There is, at present, only one life, besides your brother’s, between you and Mounthaw.’

Roy Valroy laughed.

‘What would you give,’ said he, ‘for the reversion?’

Ludlaw looked serious.

‘My learned friend,’ said he, ‘you are becoming unbearably facetious. Are you contemplating a visit to the Cheadles? If so, you had better change your mood.’

‘Yes, Ludlaw, I am going to Chelsea.’

And with these words the two men parted.

The drawing-room windows of Mr. Cheadle's house in Chelsea, five in number, look out upon the gardens in Cheyne Walk. At one of these windows Ada Cheadle is seated the same afternoon, waiting in expectation of a visit from Marion Aldershaw.

Ada has undertaken the task of communicating to Marion her father's mandate with regard to her future conduct towards Roy Valroy. The time is considered ripe for explanations: the episode which many years ago had occurred in the Aldershaw family is a mystery to the girl, which cannot reasonably remain any longer undivulged. In fact it is recognised, at last, that Marion's childhood has come to an end: she is to be acknowledged as a woman, capable

of reflection on worldly affairs, and gifted with the courage to resist the shock of painful revelations.

Marion is so long in arriving that Ada, who is easily worn out with waiting, falls asleep in her chair. She is at length awakened by the noise of Mr. Aldershaw's carriage and pair driving up to the front-door.

Marion alights, and is shown upstairs. Ada rises languidly to meet her as she steps into the room.

'I have been wishing so much,' cries Marion, throwing her arms impulsively around her cousin's neck, 'that this afternoon would come.'

In this old-fashioned drawing-room of Mr. Cheadle's the centre window is a deep bay, furnished with warm curtains and easy-chairs. Into this snug recess

Marion and Ada presently retire to have their serious talk.

When the tea-tray has been placed on a little table beside them, and Ada has poured out the tea into diminutive china cups :

‘My dear Marion,’ says she, becoming more wakeful, ‘are you really prepared to listen to family disclosures?’

‘I came, Ada,’ replies Marion, ‘on purpose. I know that you have my father’s leave to speak to me.’

‘Yes. It is even his wish.’

Sipping her tea for a while in silence, Ada at last places her empty cup upon the tray and regards Marion thoughtfully.

‘You were telling me,’ she begins, ‘one evening at Tarmouth, that when a child you believed that you had one friend ; but you could, I think you said, recall



nothing now beyond a face. Do you remember, Marion?’

‘Indeed I do,’ says Marion, fervently. ‘A loving face bending over me is what I recollect; and I think,’ she adds, with a pensive look, ‘it must have been at night, for I still see the face sometimes in my dreams.’

Ada places her hand softly upon Marion’s arm.

‘That face,’ says she, ‘was your mother’s.’

Marion clasps her hands, and tears spring into her eyes.

‘As I have always from childhood hoped and prayed!’ she cries. ‘But why have I never been told of her before?’

Her heart is beating with the thought of how much misery her constant doubt has cost her. The great, lonely Tybur-

nian mansion, in which she was born and bred, had bewildered her ever since that face had vanished. Silence had reigned like death in every room. She had scarcely seen anyone from one year's end to another, except her governess, whose sternness had only inspired her with fear and reserve. It was not until her cousin Ada came to live in town that Marion discovered some one in whom she could freely confide. She had never ceased to regard her father with a sense of awe. Her visits to him in his library had been always made with a sort of regal formality; his unbending attitude, his dark brow, and solemn tone had left upon her mind a mysterious and painful impression; and this coldness and severity repelled the faintest signs of attachment on her part. She was eager to express her affection and

sympathy towards him, but her courage had always failed.

For a moment she lives again in these wondering, infant days. Ada watches her dreamy face without a word; but after a while she places her hand once more on Marion's arm, to recall her to herself, but with a gentleness which expresses the depth of her compassion for the girl.

‘Shall I go on?’

Marion starts and wakes out of her dream.

‘Yes, Ada, I wish to know all.’

Ada Cheadle leans back in her chair, but keeps her eyes fixed on Marion.

‘You were so very young,’ says she, ‘when you last saw your mother, that it seems surprising you should have retained any recollection of her face. And are you sure that it was a loving face you

saw?' adds Ada, doubtfully. 'I do not think, my dear Marion, that it can ever have been that; for, if your mother had had any love for you, she would never have left you: she could never have acted as she has done towards your father.'

Marion turns so pale as she listens to these words that Ada looks at her in alarm. Her eyes, raised for a moment with a piteous and supplicating expression, denote the acuteness of her distress.

'Why, I thought,' she avows, 'that my mother was dead.'

Ada answers her in a low tone.

'Your father would have preferred even her death, Marion, to the calamity which actually happened.'

The girl bends her head like one solemnly condemned; for the truth breaks upon her senses with such cruel force.

It overshadows and chills her heart. Every gleam of sunshine in her young life seems to vanish. She understands all that has happened now—everything: even before her cousin Ada speaks another word.

When at last the afflictive tale of Sir Michael Valroy's villainy has been told, Marion sits, with her head still bowed, in an attitude of grief and despair. The gloomy afternoon is dusky and full of shadows; for the day is now drawing to a close. But it seems to suit Marion's mood; she had so often lingered alone at sunset when a child to recall the face of the one being whom she never had reason to doubt, until now, had loved her.

After a while a reassuring thought finds expression.

‘Perhaps she loved me once, before the temptation came, as she must have loved my father—before she left us both, and . . . Yes ! it must always be a loving face to me.’

There is some consolation in this reflection ; for a faint smile touches her lips like a passing ray of light.

Then she looks round and discovers that she is alone.

The door presently opens, and Marion hears a footstep in the room. She does not move, believing that it is Ada Cheadle who has returned, to resume her seat by her side, to cheer her with words of sympathy, which she so much needs.

But when no one approaches, and yet the footstep seems to stay, Marion glances up.

She starts and rises hastily. Roy Valroy is standing before her in the gloaming.

Marion springs forward joyfully to meet him. But as she reaches his side she draws back; for a rush of overpowering thoughts possesses her, and she cannot touch his outstretched hands, nor look into his face.

Since that memorable night upon the balcony, outside the chalet at Tarmouth, they had not met: that hour when the sound of the sea was beating in their ears and the moonlight shaped its way across the waves—that hour in which he had opened his heart to her, and she had trustfully confessed her love for him. How vividly she remembers all—all that took place that night, as she stands before

him now! Her father's appearance in the boudoir, his words with Mr. Cheadle, and his angry look, had puzzled her then. But now she comprehends clearly his displeasure. He hates with reason the name of Valroy—the name she loves.

Roy Valroy takes her hands. She does not instantly withdraw them; that would be too heartless. But she trembles at his touch.

‘How changed you are, Marion!’ he declares, in a low and injured tone.

Her heart beats fast at the sound of his voice; but still she hesitates to look into his face. That would betray too suddenly her thoughts.

‘Roy,’ says she, scarcely above a whisper, ‘why are you here?’

She does not dare express her intense delight at seeing him once more. She



must keep strong guard upon her thoughts and words or else her courage will fail. This is the hard part she is forced to play; for it is her father's wish that she should think no more of Roy Valroy than if they had never met.

‘Have I done wrong?’ pleads Roy, in a tone which almost melts her. ‘It is so long since I have seen you, Marion. You must forgive me.’

‘Roy,’ she answers, tearfully, ‘I shall never see you again.’

‘Never?’

She releases her hands from his, as though they were something which bound her to life, and then moves away.

‘Never,’ says she; ‘I must obey my father.’

Her cousin, Ada, has broken the news to her that her father intends that she

shall marry Lord Dwyver. Marion longs to tell all this to Roy. But she never can; it would completely unnerve her for the severe task which it is her duty to perform. But Roy will not doubt her love whatever may happen; she is confident that he will understand it all, and pity her.

Marion stands near the window, in the uncertain light, knowing in her heart that with this moment of leave-taking between them their dream must end. Roy steps towards her and stands at her side. Presently he speaks; and listening, as though she were at the brink of her own grave, she scarcely breathes.

‘Marion,’ he owns, in a faltering voice, ‘I believed, in the face of every obstacle, that we might some day be happy. I

loved you so deeply that I did not reflect, as I should have done; and I am grieved—angry with myself for my conduct. I should have known—indeed I did know—as soon as I heard your name, that what I wished could never be! But I think I loved you, dear,’ says Roy, looking down with great tenderness into Marion’s face, ‘the first moment we met—before I knew that it would be wrong to win your heart.’

Marion is silent. She looks up through her tears, but cannot trust herself to speak; for every word he is uttering fills her heart with a sense of mingled grief and joy; she is recalling, as though it were but yesterday, that first meeting between them. It was one sunny autumn day at Tarmouth, within sight and sound

of the sea; she was walking on the shore with Ada, and she had scarcely dared to glance towards him; but at that moment, Marion now thinks, she too had first known what it was to love.

‘I shall never,’ pursues Valroy, ‘never forget you, Marion: never change. During my travels—for I am going abroad—you will be constantly in my thoughts. Every word you have ever spoken to me will be treasured: for there is nothing you have ever said which I can forget. And when I am hundreds of miles away, no matter where, I shall picture to myself those happy hours at dear old Tarmouth; but most of all I shall think of this hour—this miserable moment for both of us—in which I am forced, Marion, to say good-bye.’

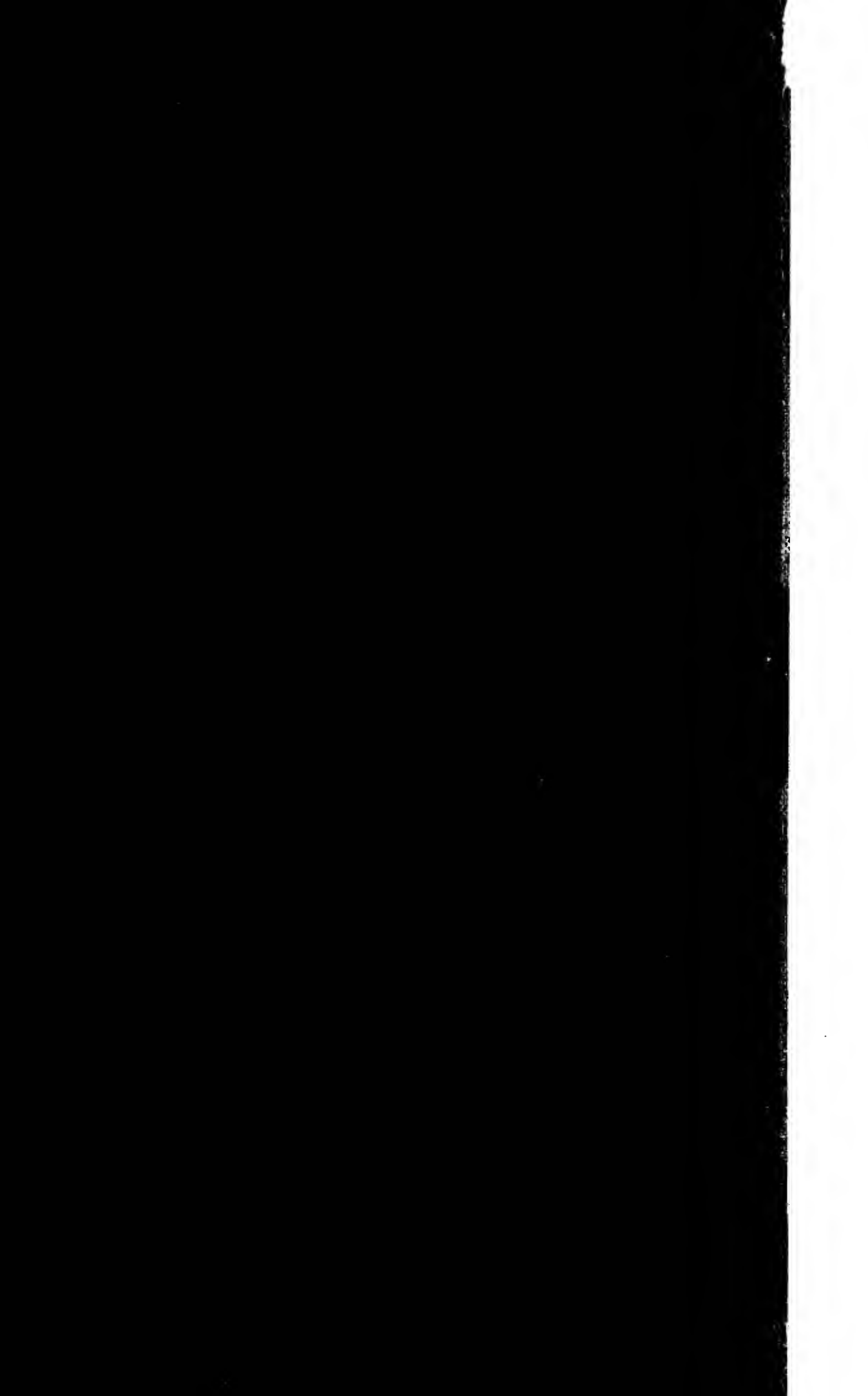
Roy Valroy seizes her trembling hands

and raises them, with a sudden and passionate impulse, to his lips: and then, with an imploring, piteous look—but without another word—he leaves Marion standing there, alone and motionless, in the twilight.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.











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